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Blunt warning

PRESIDENT Clinton sent Iraq a blunt warning on Tuesday that it faces military action if it fails to give UN arms inspectors unrestricted access to suspected weapons sites.

Clinton made the threat as he praised a UN Security Council resolution passed unanimously on Monday warning Iraq of the "severest consequences" if it fails to live up to a UN-brokered agreement on the inspections.

"The government of Iraq should be under no illusion. The meaning of 'severest consequences' is clear. It provides authority to act if Iraq does not turn the commitment it has now made into compliance," Clinton said at a White House event.

"No promise of peace and no policy of patience can be without its limits," he added. "Iraq must fulfil without obstruction or delay its commitments to open all of the nation to the international weapons inspectors, any place, any time, without any conditions, deadlines or excuses."

'It depends'

THE SUCCESS of the agreement between Iraq and the UN depends on the behaviour of weapons inspectors of the UN Special Commission [UNSCOM] on Iraq's disarmament, deputy Prime Minister Tarek Aziz said Tuesday.

"It depends on how UNSCOM is going to behave," he said.

"UNSCOM has also to honour the commitments incorporated in the memorandum of understanding — they have to show respect for the sovereignty and dignity of Iraq," Aziz added. "If UNSCOM is going to act the way it acted in the past, it is going to do a lot of harm."

Aziz insisted that Monday's Security Council resolution precluded the automatic use of force against Iraq.

UN envoy

IN AN effort to coordinate UN policies on Iraq, Secretary-General Kofi Annan is expected to name an Indian diplomat as his new special representative to communicate with Baghdad leaders, UN sources said.

The envoy, Prakash Shah, was India's UN ambassador until a few months ago and has served in Japan and Malaysia. He was scheduled to meet Annan yesterday.

UN officials said that Annan, after his recent trip to Baghdad, wanted a political adviser to help him coordinate the large UN operations in Iraq and keep open communications with the leadership there.

Annan tour

UN SECRETARY-General Kofi Annan, who postponed a trip to a number of Middle East countries last month because of the crisis over Iraq, has rescheduled the visits for later this month, Reuters reported.

Annan's planned tour comes amid speculation that the US administration was preparing a new initiative to salvage the Middle East peace process. President Clinton huddled with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, peace envoy Dennis Ross and Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk at the White House on Tuesday but officials said no clear course of action emerged from the meeting.

Weizman wins

ISRAEL's President Ezer Weizman, 73, was re-elected to a second five-year term yesterday, easily defeating an underdog challenger from the ruling Likud Party, AFP reported. Weizman received the support of 63 deputies in the 120-member Knesset, while his challenger, Shaul Amor, who enjoyed the backing of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, received 49 votes. To win the election in the first round, Weizman needed 61 votes.

Shortly after the vote, Netanyahu called Weizman to congratulate him.


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Face to face with history

WHEN archaeologists opened the Tomb of Ifuaa in the necropolis of Abuseer between Giza and Saqqara, on Friday, Nevine El-Aref was watching as the outer sarcophagus of the high priest was lifted to reveal a layer of earth. This was removed carefully by workers using brushes, and slowly the features on the sarcophagus came to light.

This is the first intact tomb to be opened in Egypt since the discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922. And although there was no glittering gold to greet spectators, the features were fashioned with great delicacy and drew sighs of appreciation.

Czech archaeologists, working under the direction of Miroslav Verner, have been excavating at Abu Sir — which is primarily an Old Kingdom burial ground — for 34 years now, and have made some remarkable discoveries.

(see pp.16&17)

Contest over 'language'

Controversy continues over whether the latest Security Council resolution gives the US the right to strike at Iraq. **Hoda Tawfik** writes from New York

It was a tough week for the US administration, which faced severe criticism of its policy on Iraq, at the United Nations and also from key congressional Republicans.

The majority of the UN Security Council's member-states declined to give the US the green light to attack Iraq if it violated a pledge to permit unconditional UN weapons inspections. And Senate majority leaders charged that President Bill Clinton had turned vital US interests over to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who came back from the Iraqi capital armed with a deal.

Egypt's UN Ambassador Nabil El-Arabi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "France, Russia and China led the fight against giving the US the green light for aggression against Iraq without the Security Council's endorsement."

No "automaticity" was permitted under the Council's resolution, approved unanimously on Monday after a compromise formula was introduced by Brazil and Sweden, El-Arabi said. "No licence was given by the Council to any country to wage war against Iraq without having to go back to the Council first," he added.

But the US and Britain insist that they do not need the Council's authority to strike against Iraq if it fails to honour the deal brokered by Annan. Yet the Clinton administration badly needed Monday's resolution which brought the Baghdad-Annan accord firmly under the Council's control, if only to demonstrate to Congressional leaders that matters were now in the hands of a body in which the US is used to flexing its muscles and getting its way.

Iraq was obviously opposed to the resolution, but "nobody asked us for our opinion," said Nizar Hamdoun, the Iraqi ambassador to the UN.

In order to ensure a consensus, Japan's ambassador assured the Council that the resolution was not meant to address "automaticity" or prejudice future issues.

Finally, a compromise was introduced by Sweden and Brazil, adding paragraph five which gives the Council the authority to "remain actively seized of the matter in order to ensure implementation of the resolution, and to secure peace and security in the area."

But what difference does this language make if the US insists that it has the authority to strike?

"The whole matter revolves around words, formulations and is subject to different interpretations. But under this article, the Council reserved the right and responsibility to decide what should be done if Iraq breached the agreement in the future. No country is allowed to wage war automatically," said El-Arabi.

Speaking to the Council after the unanimous vote, El-Arabi made it clear that, under the UN Charter, there are controls on the use of force that must be respected. He also alluded to the "double-standards" used in addressing the problem of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

So, what will be the outcome of the resolution threatening Iraq with the "severest consequences" if it fails to honour its obligations?

America's response is that it all depends on Iraq. "The view of the United States is that we are better off either way with this agreement," an administration official said. "If the Iraqis are to reverse their course of action and allow the UN Special Commission [UNSCOM] to have unconditional, unfettered access across the board to all sites, then the best way of confronting this problem will have been achieved. If not, then everyone knows what is meant by the severest consequences."

According to State Department spokesman James Rubin, the words "severest consequences" are diplomatic code for military action.

The administration also took comfort from a veiled, extraordinary warning made by Annan, who said that a second round of diplomacy was unlikely.

The administration's strategy was defined succinctly by National Security Adviser Samuel Berger: "We must maintain the resolve, alone if necessary, to prevent Saddam from threatening the region, in other words, contain him."

(see pp.4&5)

Elephantine treasures

After three decades of work, ancient sites on Elephantine are now open to the public. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** attended the opening celebrations

Archaeologists had no idea just what they were getting into when they first started work on Elephantine Island 30 years ago.

"We knew that here were the ruins of an ancient settlement, but the whole island was covered in the dust and debris of centuries, so we did not know what we were likely to find," said excavations director Werner Kaiser, who confessed he had chosen the island by chance from among several potential dig sites.

Now, after three decades of careful excavation and restoration, the archaeological and historical treasures of the island — located near the Old Cataract Hotel in Aswan — are finally open to the public. The grand opening ceremony on 28 February was attended by Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) Gaballa A. Gaballa, the Swiss and German ambassadors, along with archaeologists and civil engineers.

A joint German-Swiss team of experts has been working to remove debris, unveil tombs, temples and houses, and document the site. The work has yielded a wealth of information about its inhabitants from pre-history right through to Christian times. "This is not a funerary structure or a temple. It is an entire town with a continuous history since its foundation more than 3,000 years ago," Kaiser said.

Hosni commended the German government and the German Archaeological Institute for their "continuous cooperation with Egypt and for lending a helping hand and providing whatever we ask [for] in the field of archaeology."

Germany's Ambassador Wolf Dietrich Schilling said his country's contribution to the project was "an expression of German respect, esteem and admiration for the culture and history of Egypt."

After the inauguration speeches, the dignitaries toured the island. Later, the site was filled with local villagers who performed traditional dances and sang local songs to celebrate the occasion.

"In ancient times Elephantine was the frontier town of Egypt, a fortress overlooking the First Cataract on the border with Nubia, and the melting pot of different ethnic groups, Egyptian and Nubian," Gaballa told reporters.

Among the excavated and restored historic buildings is the temple of the goddess Satet, one of the earliest and most important deities in the Cataract area. The restored temple is an 18th Dynasty structure, dating from the time of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, though painted blocks from earlier periods have been found in the foundations.

Blocks from chapels and temples from the 11th and 12th dynasties were also found. But perhaps the most exciting find occurred during the restoration and reconstruction of the Satet Temple, which appears to have been constructed on what is believed to be the oldest sanctuary in Egypt, hidden between huge rocks.

The temple proved to be "something sensational because we don't have such sanctuaries dating from so early a period of the Old Kingdom," Kaiser said.

Also restored and rebuilt is the sanctuary of Heqaib, a cult centre discovered by the famous Egyptian archaeologist Labib Habachi.

On the southern *kom* (mound), living quarters that date to the Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom and the Late Period are located.

"The archaeological site occupies 20 feddans of the island, at its southern tip," Attyia Radwan, head of the Aswan antiquities department told the *Weekly*. "The island has been occupied by Nubians since the construction of the first Aswan Dam at the turn of the 20th century who still live there," she said.

On the central *kom*, sections of the official quarters have been restored including the walls of a temple, administrative buildings, mansions, and an area where the ruins of an early church were found.

A monumental staircase leading up from the Nile to the Temple of Khnum, the main deity on the island, has been re-erected along with the impressive arcades along the river embankment.

Apart from excavation and restoration in the archaeological area, a museum has been built on the island to house and exhibit artifacts unearthed in the past 30 years. "This is the first site museum of its kind in Egypt," Gaballa said.

"The island was of such strategic importance that it was ruled by powerful governors who led trade expeditions to Africa," said Reiner Stadleman, head of the German Institute of Archaeology. "This explains the large houses on the island and the big tombs on Qubbet El-Hawa (on the west bank of the Nile) where they were buried."

The site may well be open but new objects continue to be unearthed and only a week ago two wooden sanctuary shrines of Heqaib were discovered. Kaiser and his colleagues will continue to excavate the site. In Kaiser's words: "What has been unearthed is only a tip of the iceberg."

Parliament blasts US 'double-standards'

America's "schizophrenic" Middle East policy came under severe criticism during a parliamentary debate attended by Foreign Minister Moussa. **Gamal Essam El-Din** was there



Foreign Minister Amr Moussa emphasised on Sunday that Egyptian and Arab diplomatic efforts were instrumental in averting an American air strike against Iraq. "The Arab diplomatic efforts and public opinion were key factors in persuading the Iraqi leadership of the necessity to fully comply with all relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council," said Moussa.

He expressed great hope that the agreement concluded between UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Saddam Hussein could lead soon to a lifting of the sanctions imposed on Iraq. "The honest implementation of this agreement should give Iraq hope that the sanctions imposed on it are not eternal. This should be quite clear because if Iraq is strongly required to comply fully with resolutions of the Security Council, the UN Special Commission [UNSCOM] on Iraq's disarmament should be equally required to carry out its weapons inspections honestly. The whole process, in other words, should be carried out in a dynamic way to reassure Iraq that things are moving forward. For its part, Egypt is fully confident that implementation of the agreement under Annan's full supervision means that at last there will be a light at the end of the tunnel for Iraq," Moussa said.

Addressing a joint meeting of parliament's Arab and Foreign Affairs and National Defence Committees, Moussa said that Egypt has made full use of its leading role in the Arab world to avert a military strike against Iraq. "Egypt and the United States were not on the same side during the recent crisis," Moussa asserted. "The United States has an international perspective in dealing with foreign issues and we have our different regional perspective in dealing with the same issues. We are the oldest nation in this region. We are Arab and we have our own deep-rooted interests. There is a limit to what we could accept. We want this superpower to be an honest broker. We want to see it adopt a balanced attitude towards Arabs and Israelis. We want to see it develop a comprehensive approach in dealing with the issues of this region, rather than adopt an approach that gives utmost attention to Israel's security alone. It is true that there is a general feeling of frustration over America's double standards in this region," Moussa said.

The "double standards" of America's Middle East policy came under severe parliamentary fire during the meeting. A large number of deputies denounced the US military buildup in the Gulf, which is directed against Iraq, as an "indication of the mounting American aggressive intentions against the Arab peoples." They urged Moussa that the coming period should be used by Egypt for consolidating Arab solidarity against the "international mafia" led by the United States and Britain.

Rifaat El-Remisi, an MP for Daqahliya governorate, asked Moussa if Egyptian diplomacy still adopts the late President Anwar El-Sadat's viewpoint that 99 per cent of the cards of the Middle East problem are held in America's hands. "We want to know if you still adopt this point of view even after the American prejudice against Arabs became very clear," El-Remisi said. Moussa, in response, warned MPs that severing relations and adopting a confrontational stance can no longer serve as the Arab way of solving problems with America. "We are now in a totally different world order," he said. "We have a lot of complicated interests with the United States and we should not undermine these interests. It is in our favour to keep good relations with America. We can talk with American officials about the pressing need to change their policies in this region. We can explain to them that America's evident bias towards Israel could lead to a near-complete devastation of their interests in this region. We can also urge them to show a greater understanding of Arab public opinion, which played a very big role in preventing military agression against Iraq. Besides, we have strong economic interests with this superpower and we have to keep these interests intact. Egyptian foreign diplomacy has rid itself of the old nervousness, confrontation and the tendency to break off relations."

But Moussa also said that there is a limit. "For example, we cannot sanction that Yasser Arafat be delivered on a silver platter to the Israelis and we cannot sanction the destruction of Iraq," Moussa explained.

On consolidating Arab unity, Moussa said that arranging an Arab summit is a possibility at any time. "But we all have seen how President Mubarak managed through telephone conversations with Arab leaders to positively contribute to a solution of the Iraqi crisis. In the 1960s, it was easy to organise an Arab summit every now and then, but now the telecommunications revolution can serve the same purpose," said Moussa.

Moussa also delivered a panoramic review of the current situation in the Middle East. According to him, the Middle East is in the grip of a triangle of crises. "The first is the US-Iraq stand-off; the second is the stalled peace process and the third is the hectic attempts to impose a new order on the Middle East," Moussa explained.

He held Israel's Likud government responsible for stalling the peace process. "You should know that this government is not interested at all in conducting any negotiations on the restoration of Palestinian land," Moussa told the parliamentarians. "And even if they agreed to negotiate, the negotiations would be restricted to a very limited area. They think that the current international conditions are working in their favour and that the Arabs are in such a weak position that they could be easily forced to accept what they would like them to accept. For our part, we believe that this is a very narrow-minded perspective. The Israelis should know that their own survival basically depends on the Arabs' acceptance of their existence. It is this acceptance that will let them live a secure and peaceful life. But if they thought they could impose a humiliating status on their Arab neighbours, let me tell them they will never be able to do so. They should know that neither using force nor making alliances with such non-Arab countries as Turkey could lead to imposing Israeli hegemony on the Arab world."

Moussa affirmed that Egypt will never join any type of alliance. "We have a historical record of rejecting alliances. I do not like to be nostalgic but I wanted to draw on the past to emphasise that we will never take part or even debate the possibility of any strategic alliances or any new order as long as a just solution has not been evolved for the Palestinian problem."

Turning from the Middle East to Africa, Moussa said he was embarking on Tuesday on a tour of seven African countries at the head of an official and business delegation. "Do you know that Egypt's trade with Africa stands at just $50 million," he informed the deputies. "The volume of trade with the countries I'm going to visit is valued at merely $5 million. Egyptian diplomacy is not one-track minded. We have to be active at both the diplomatic and business levels."

Moussa was particularly proud of Egypt's success in arranging a settlement between the Somali faction leaders, thus bringing their civil conflict to an end. "I indicated to the Ethiopians in Addis Ababa last week that we are not in competition over Somalia," he said. "I told them that we are in the same boat and we both have strategic interests in the Horn of Africa." He also indicated that the majority of press reports on an alleged dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia on Nile waters are entirely unfounded. "I told them that we are ready to conduct a dialogue on Nile water at any time," said Moussa.

On Sudan, Moussa said that although Egypt opposes the policies of the Khartoum government, it is keen to uphold that nation's sovereignty and territorial unity. He described as "press talk" reports about an imminent visit by Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir to Egypt.

Cairo and Addis to work together on Somalia

Good faith is crucial if Egypt and Ethiopia are to succeed in resolving their differences, writes **Dina Ezzat**

Contentious issues continue to mar Egyptian-Ethiopian relations, with Addis Ababa accusing Cairo of holding a monopoly on Nile waters and questioning its intentions on the Horn of Africa. But last week's talks between Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and Ethiopian leaders in Addis Ababa appeared to have contained a potential war of words between the two countries. The talks were held on the sidelines of a conference of Organisation of African Unity (OAU) foreign ministers.

However, the dispute over the use of Nile waters has not been resolved. Another point of contention is the Cairo-sponsored peace deal between the faction leaders of Somalia. Addis Ababa claims the settlement interrupted previous Ethiopian peace-brokered efforts and was an attempt to impose Egypt's agenda on the Horn of Africa.

"Egypt and Ethiopia have historic relations and it is constructive consultations [between them] on all issues that should be pursued," Moussa said following his return from the three-day OAU meeting that opened on 25 February.

Both the Nile water and Somali issues were on the agenda of talks held between Moussa and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. At the meeting Moussa also affirmed that Egypt remains firmly opposed to the division of Sudan into a northern Arab state and a southern Christian-animist state.

The meeting, originally scheduled for 15 minutes, ran for 75 minutes. The two had a "very frank discussion in which Foreign Minister Moussa explained Egypt's strategic interests," said Mohamed Shaaban, assistant to the foreign minister for African affairs.

According to Shaaban, there was much "misinformation" that Moussa "dissipated" about the nature of the Egyptian role in brokering the Somali peace arrangement. Ethiopia had accused Egypt of backing a certain clan in its efforts to gain the upper hand, but Cairo rejected the accusation.

By the end of the meeting, Shaaban, said "it was mutually agreed that Egypt and Ethiopia will coordinate closely on an all-inclusive reconciliation in Somalia."

Moussa also met with Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin.

On the water issue, Moussa made it clear that Egypt is acting within its quota as defined by a 1959 water-sharing agreement. He denied that two mega irrigation projects — Toshka, in south-west Egypt, and the Al-Salam Canal in Sinai — were diverting the Nile's course.

"It is an absolute fallacy to say that Egypt has diverted the course of the Nile," Moussa said in Addis Ababa. "This is utter nonsense and has no truth in it."

While stating that his talks in Addis Ababa were constructive, Moussa conceded that there are issues of disagreement that sill need to be discussed.

According to a Cairo-based Ethiopian diplomat, the 1959 agreement that defines the Nile water quotas of Egypt and Sudan — the two downstream countries — will always remain the subject of dispute and needs to be revised. Claiming that the agreement allocated all the Nile water to Egypt and Sudan, the diplomat said: "For us, this is a useless agreement and we don't recognise it. This is a very difficult and complicated issue. The Egyptian side is aware of our position."

Moussa said that the Ethiopian officials whom he met in Addis Ababa did not seek a revision of the agreement.

Ethiopian officials are on record as saying their country will pursue developmental projects to maximise use of Nile waters. Vice Foreign Minister Tedka Alemou said last week that Ethiopia "will continue to use the water of the Nile for development until the issue is settled, even if it takes 100 years."

Ethiopia is said to be eager to build dams along the Blue Nile which provides Egypt with the largest portion of its water quota. According to international law and relevant treaties Egypt and Sudan, as the downstream countries, must approve such projects before the upstream country can go ahead with them. If the World Bank or a foreign donor was to offer the upstream country a loan or grant to finance these projects, the downstream countries must be referred back to first.

Sources say that Ethiopia has forwarded four plans, mostly power-generation projects, to the World Bank, which has not taken a decision yet.

Egypt says that it is not opposed to the implementation of developmental projects in any of the Nile Basin countries as long as its quota remains intact. In the particular case of Ethiopia, Shaaban said, "we offered to help [with any project] but the offer was turned down."

However, some news reports suggested that Ethiopia might get financing from some Western donors, possibly the United States, to build the Blue Nile dams. But an Egyptian official dismissed the reports. "This would be a direct encroachment exceeding the rules of the game."

The official added: "We are well aware that some Western powers may want to do this at a later stage, but not just yet." The reason for the "not just yet" rationale, he explained, is that the West has not yet decided whether to exclude Egypt from the "future plans for the region."

In any event, Egypt and Ethiopia have agreed to re-activate a bilateral technical committee, first established in 1993, to discuss all water-related issues. The outcome of the committee's meetings depends on the intentions of the two parties. Egypt says it would like to maintain "excellent" relations with Ethiopia but believes that Addis Ababa's decision to escalate the water dispute is not entirely without ulterior motives because Ethiopian agriculture depends almost exclusively on heavy rainfall. For its part, Ethiopia says the agreements of the past are of no value to the present or future.

Cairo-Doha reconciliation revived

Another round of Saudi mediation appears to have contained an Egyptian-Qatari quarrel

There were several indications this week that the dispute between Egypt and the Gulf state of Qatar had been defused — for the second time in three months, writes **Dina Ezzat**. President Hosni Mubarak sent Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin to Doha on Tuesday with a message to Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamed bin Khalifa Al-Thani. Mubarak's message contained an open invitation to the emir to visit Cairo. And Bahaeddin told reporters that Egypt and Qatar will now work on establishing the guidelines for good bilateral relations.

Bahaeddin's visit appeared to be the result of a second round of Saudi mediation, undertaken by Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal who visited Cairo on Sunday and met with Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Following Saud's departure, Mubarak received a telephone call from Sheikh Hamed. And following Saud's return to Riyadh, the Qatari emir received a message from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia.

Egyptian-Qatari relations plummeted last November when Doha accused Cairo of lobbying the majority of Arab states to boycott, or send low-level delegations, to the fourth Middle East/North Africa [MENA IV] Economic Conference that was hosted by the Gulf state. Sheikh Hamed also charged that Egyptian authorities were involved in a failed attempt to restore his father, whom he had overthrown, to the throne.

Egypt denied the two charges. It said it boycotted MENA IV to highlight its disapproval of Israeli policy in Arab-Israeli peace talks. Egypt also said it does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

Cairo also said that some Qatari officials were involved in financing Islamist militant organisations working against the Egyptian government.

The dispute escalated into a heated war of words between the two countries until Fahd stepped in last December. The Saudi monarch invited Mubarak and Sheikh Hamed to a reconciliation summit which he hosted in Riyadh. Although the two leaders agreed to bury the hatchet, the reconciliation was short-lived.

A few weeks after the Riyadh summit, the war of words resumed. Worse, Qatari authorities laid off about 700 Egyptian professionals, who worked for both the private and public sectors. Many of them had to leave on short notice.

The Egyptian Trade Union Federation reacted by announcing plans it would lodge an official complaint with Arab and international labour organisations.

And yet, according to an official source, moves were made by the two countries to contain their differences. Through a third party, Qatar promised Egypt that it will stop sacking Egyptians, the official said. There were also promises that some of these Egyptians would be given their jobs back.

On Monday, Qatar publicly vowed to financially compensate Egyptians who lost their jobs. The pledge was made at an Arab labour conference in Luxor that was attended by Qatar's Minister of Housing and Civilian Affairs Falah bin Jassem and Egypt's Labour Minister Ahmed Al-Amawi.

As a result, the Egyptian Workers Federation said it would freeze its plan to file a complaint against Qatar. But at the same time it warned that it would go ahead with the litigation unless the financial compensation of the laid off workers was adequate.

In mid-March, Qatar will host a foreign ministers conference of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). If Foreign Minister Amr Moussa shows up in Doha, this will be a definite sign that reconciliation has been sealed, sources said.

Syndicate acts to prevent editor's imprisonment

Shaden Shehab reports on efforts to reach an out-of-court settlement to save the chief editor of *Al-Shaab* opposition newspaper from a year's imprisonment

The Islamist-oriented Labour Party and the Press Syndicate are attempting to negotiate a settlement between Magdi Hussein, chief editor of the party's twice-weekly newspaper, *Al-Shaab*, and Alaa El-Alfi, son of former interior minister Hassan El-Alfi. The out-of-court settlement would prevent Hussein from serving the one-year jail sentence handed down by an appeals court.

Hussein was put on trial for publishing a series of articles in *Al-Shaab* accusing Alaa El-Alfi of corruption and abuse of power. Two lawsuits were filed by El-Alfi against Hussein and cartoonist Mohamed Hilal. A third lawsuit was brought by Azza Hassan Amin and her husband. The newspaper alleged that she was married to Alaa's brother, Adel, and that she used this relationship to buy property at cheap prices.

A primary court sentenced Hussein on 27 January to three years in jail for the three cases and ordered him to pay a LE15,000 fine. Hilal was sentenced to one year behind bars.

Hussein and Hilal filed an appeal. The Misdemeanours Appeals Court for the Cairo district of Boulaq found the two guilty but commuted the sentences to one year in prison for each and reduced Hussein's fine to LE7,500.

The Labour Party's lawyer then took the case to the Court of Cassation, the only legal recourse left for Hussein and Hilal. But the two must go to jail until the court reaches a verdict.

Neither Hussein nor Hilal turned themselves in or were arrested. Hussein is currently in Tehran "but will return soon and surrender to the authorities," a party source told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "As for Hilal, he is staying at a relative's home until Hussein returns. He does not want to give himself up for the time being," the source said.

But many observers believe the two planned to stay in hiding until their jail sentences are commuted by the prosecutor-general. This order would definitely be forthcoming if an out-of-court settlement is reached.

"Since the Appeals Court handed down the sentence, the Press Syndicate has made great efforts to achieve a reconciliation," said the syndicate's chairman, Makram Mohamed Ahmed. "In fact, an agreement was drafted but, unfortunately, it was acceptable to only one party. But we should not lose hope; negotiations are continuing."

Labour Party lawyer Mamdouh Farag told the *Weekly* that El-Alfi's preconditions for reconciliation are "impossible to meet. He insists on an apology to be published by *Al-Shaab*. In other words, the newspaper should say that all that was published about El-Alfi are lies, which is not the case."

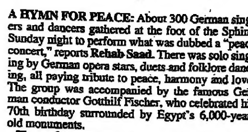
Farag said that Hussein "will never agree to that, even though El-Alfi has the upper hand now." Farag added that "some other way" should be explored.

ZEIN

Correction

The article entitled, "Anti-US fervour on Egyptian campuses" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 February - 4 March) mistakenly implied that economist Professor Galal Amin had taken part in a demonstration organised by the Labour Party before the US Embassy in Cairo to protest the threatened strike against Iraq; the article also mistakenly reported that Professor Amin had been a member of the delegation of protesters admitted to the US Embassy to submit a petition against the threatened strike.

We duly apologise.



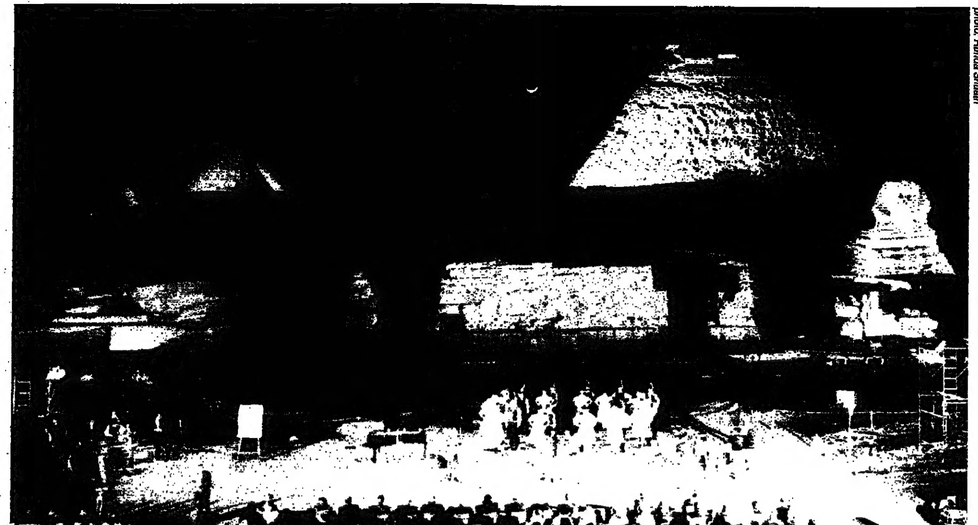


photo: Randa Shaath

A HYMN FOR PEACE: About 300 German singers and dancers gathered at the foot of the Sphinx Sunday night to perform what was dubbed a "peace concert," reports **Rehab Saad**. There was solo singing by German opera stars, duets and folklore dancing, all paying tribute to peace, harmony and love. The group was accompanied by the famous German conductor Gotthilf Fischer, who celebrated his 70th birthday surrounded by Egypt's 6,000-year-old monuments.

The performance, at the Son et Lumiere Theatre, began with a laser show that recounted the history of the Giza necropolis in German. This was followed by songs by Rita Szalok, Arianna D'Accanti and Hans Albert Demer, duets and folklore dances by the Cottbus troupe. Wearing the traditional costumes of their city, once located in what used to be East Germany, the dancers carried flowers in their hands. The performance ended with Fischer conducting the "Friends of Egypt" choir, which sang for Egypt and peace.

"I always sing for peace, never for war," Fischer told the audience. "We are here in the shadow of the Great Pyramids to sing for Egypt. In Germany, we always have the Pyramids in mind when we think of peace."

This was Fischer's second visit to Egypt in nine months. He was in Cairo last June, also to campaign for peace through his music.

"We are happy that this concert was held at this particular spot because the historic background is bound to promote the event," said Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui. "It is also part of cultural and tourism cooperation with Germany."

The event will become a permanent fixture on the Egyptian tourist calendar and will be staged on an annual basis, Beltagui added.

Dubious statement triggers newspaper closure

A non-partisan weekly newspaper, which printed a death threat against three Coptic businessmen, has been suspended. Amira Ibrahim investigates

Authorities have banned the publication of the independent weekly newspaper *Al-Destour* after it printed a death threat against three Coptic businessmen allegedly made by the militant Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. In addition to running the text of the statement, the newspaper quoted experts and security sources who questioned its authenticity and suggested that it could be the result of business rivalries.

The statement accused the three businessmen, who were identified by their initials only, of undermining the national economy by holding a monopoly on major industries. It warned that unless they departed the country, leaving their property behind, they would pay with their lives and the lives of their families.

Ibrahim Eissa, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he decided to publish the dubious statement because "it could mark the most serious development yet in the campaign launched by terrorism. It warns of a possible direct blow to the national economy, after the blows that were directed to tourism and foreigners, by seeking to scare prominent businessmen and force them to leave the country."

Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif was quoted by the opposition newspaper *Al-Wafd* as saying that *Al-Destour* is published under a Cypriot licence. "Thus, it is dealt with as a foreign publication that is subject to the provisions of the Foreign Publications Law, and not the Egyptian press law. It is printed in an Egyptian press organisation on the authority of a permit that must be renewed every three months."

El-Sherif was quoted as having said that the censorship board, which is concerned with foreign publications, prohibits the entry of any newspaper that "questions religion or the basic ethics of society, propagates destructive ideas, or publishes news that aims to undermine confidence in the Egyptian economy."

El-Sherif explained that the Supreme Press Council is the sole authority empowered by law to license newspapers. The publishers of *Al-Destour*, he was quoted as saying, have the right to apply for a licence from the Council "if they wish to reappear as an Egyptian newspaper that is subject to Egyptian press law."

Essam Fahmi, the newspaper's board chairman, told the *Weekly* that *Al-Destour* applied for a licence in June 1997 but was turned down. The publishers then decided to take the matter to court, he said.

Makram Mohamed Ahmed, the Press Syndicate's chairman, said the suspension was a "setback for press freedom" which was the outcome of a "wrong situation that should be rectified." He urged the government to simplify the procedures of establishing new newspapers. "I believe that the phenomenon of Cypriot-licensed newspapers is the product of restrictions on acquiring a local publishing license. I believe that this should be corrected."

For his part, *Al-Dustour's* Eissa charged that although Law 93, which had provided stiff penalties for offending publications, has been repealed, "the same approach remains. The latest amendment of the Companies Law made the publication of new newspapers conditional on the cabinet's approval, thus imposing more restrictions on press freedom in violation of the constitution."

Many experts said they did not believe that the threatening statement published by *Al-Destour* was issued by Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. "The way it was written and the information it contained raise the possibility that it was the outcome of a conflict between the businessmen themselves," wrote researcher Rifaat El-Sayed Ahmed. "They appear to be inciting the militants to carry out acts of violence and assassinations. This means that they want to drag us into the same dark tunnel of terrorism into which Algeria has fallen."

Eissa said he was aware of this possibility. Experts quoted by the newspaper also doubted the statement came from Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. "As a conscientious journalist, the two possibilities [that the statement was issued by Al-Gama'a or rival businessmen] had to be addressed to warn against their grave consequences," Eissa said.

The weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef* identified the three businessmen as Naguib Sawiriss, Raouf Ghabbour and Rami Lakah.

Sawiriss was quoted by the magazine as saying he believed the whole affair was a by-product of business rivalries. "I accuse a certain businessman of being behind this statement because I was recently involved in heavy competition. The proof is that the information contained in the statement is not available to terrorist groups." Sawiriss was quoted as having said.

Ghabbour, the second targeted businessman, appeared to agree. He was quoted by the magazine as saying: "It may be true that the statement is the product of business rivalries... At any rate, the statement draws the attention of the militant groups to the idea of hitting investments, whether those made by foreigners, Muslims or Copts. Publication will only create a climate of terror."

Commented Eissa: "I was surprised that the three businessmen were disturbed by the statement being published and not by what it contained."

Launched in late 1995, *Al-Destour* published in its first issue its own code of ethics, vowing to fight corruption, Israel, and attempts by wealthy Gulf Arabs to gain hegemony over Egypt.

Known for its sensational news coverage, *Al-Destour* is said to be basically financed by its 150,000 circulation.

Through 116 issues, *Al-Destour* was banned once and came very close to being shut down for either addressing subjects which other newspapers consider taboo or for its sensationalism. In 1997, it became embroiled in a confrontation with the judiciary for publishing allegations of corruption against judges. The crisis ended when *Al-Destour* published an apology.

On the same day last Saturday that *Al-Wafd* ran a front-page story about *Al-Destour*'s suspension, *Al Wafd*'s Chief Editor Gamal Badawi published an editorial urging the Supreme Press Council to give priority to the issue of what he called the "yellow press, which has disfigured the face of Egyptian journalism, harmed its reputation and tainted the image of Egyptian society before the world."

"Is the freedom of the press the freedom to publish pictures of women's underwear, sneak into bedrooms and publicise lewdness and prostitution?" Badawi asked.

The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) condemned the suspension of the newspaper, describing it as another violation of press freedom.

"I am not optimistic that the government will reconsider its decision," Eissa said. "But I am confident that Egyptian journalists are determined to defend press freedom. I have received many offers from newspapers and magazines, some of which take an opposite line to ours, to devote a number of pages to publishing our material, an alternative that we are considering at present."

Netting the militants' network

The government continues its drive to persuade some Islamic and European countries to tighten the noose around émigré militants. Dina Ezzat reports

Efforts were intensified during the past few months to explore all possible ways by which the government may gain the extradition of expatriate militants who take refuge in some Western and Islamic states. In cases where extradition is unlikely due to the host countries' political, legal or human rights concerns, Egypt hopes that it will be able to persuade these states to curtail militant activities. The objective is to make sure that these expatriates — who are mostly leading figures in Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, Jihad and Tala'ei Al-Fath (Vanguards of Conquest) organisations — are denied the opportunity to plan or finance attacks against Egyptian officials or interests inside or outside Egypt.

Last week, Cairo hosted a meeting of experts of member-states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to draft the guidelines of an anti-terrorism resolution. The guidelines were based on a "code of conduct" approved by the last OIC summit held in Tehran in December. Egypt was the prime mover behind this code.

The framework that was worked out in Cairo will be reviewed, and possibly adopted, by the next OIC foreign ministers conference that will take place in two weeks in the Qatari capital of Doha.

Eventually, these guidelines will be turned into a convention that will be binding on the over 50 members of the OIC, hopefully before the end of this century.

The draft framework defines terrorism as "any act of violence or threat, notwithstanding its motives or intentions." In more elaborate terms, terrorism is any "criminal plan which aims at terrorising people or threatening to harm them or endangering their lives, honour, security, freedom or rights or damaging the environment, facility or public and private property" or harming "foreigners on the territory" of the targeted country.

The convention will require signatories to "ensure that their territories are not used as an arena for planning or organising or executing terrorist crimes" and to "block the infiltration of terrorist elements" or offer them "shelter, refuge, training, arms, finance or any other facilities."

Officials concerned find the language of the proposed convention satisfactory and believe it would serve to curtail militant activities. It is also believed that getting countries with whom Egypt would like to maintain close security cooperation, including Iran, Sudan and Pakistan, to sign this convention would be a major achievement for Egypt's security programme.

Meanwhile, Egypt has been talking with a number of European countries in the hope of persuading them to expel militants residing there or, at least, prevent them from using their territory as a springboard for action against Egyptian interests. These countries include Britain, Austria, Sweden and Switzerland.

"The problem is that they tell us that according to their legal systems, a good number of these militants, particularly those who were not convicted by an appeals court, are entitled to political refuge," explained one official. "Other governments refuse to cooperate with us because they do not want to antagonise local human rights groups."

To get around this, Egypt has acted to capitalise on all relevant UN conventions or treaties that include language supporting "counter-terrorism principles." In a number of documents that were adopted by the UN General Assembly, there is clear reference to the fact that states should be "firmly determined" to "eliminate international terrorism in all its forms" and that there should be "international cooperation between states" to achieve this purpose.

However, the language of these documents does not include an air-tight definition of terrorism. "Basically, Western countries would like to pick the elements that threaten them most," explained one official. Citing an example, he said international anti-terrorism conventions talk about terrorist attacks against civil aviation safety, but not about attacks against tourists visiting a foreign country.

At any rate, argued one source, ultimately what counts most is not ratified documents and declarations. The extradition or expulsion of a militant by a country that used to give him refuge is "basically a political decision," the source said. In the absence of a political will, he added, it does not really matter how many bilateral security treaties Egypt signs because there is always a loophole that could allow some of the expatriates to enjoy the safety of a host country.

New front pledges anti-American *jihad*

The reported formation of an "International Islamic Front" raises the question whether the militant groups are actually closing ranks or attempting to cover up their differences

A statement signed by leaders of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, Jihad and other militant Islamist leaders announced last week the establishment of an "International Islamic Front" dedicated to waging *jihad* against "crusaders and Jews", reports **Amira Ibrahim**. The groups, presumably taking advantage of anti-US sentiments spawned by the Iraq crisis, urged Muslims to kill Americans — both soldiers and civilians.

In addition to Jihad and Gama'a leaders — Ayman El-Zawahri and Rifa'i Taha, respectively, the front's founders included the Saudi-born militant millionaire Osama bin Laden; Meer Hamza, secretary of the Pakistani Ulama Association; Fadl El-Rahman Khalil, leader of the Pakistani Al-Ansar movement; and Sheikh Abdel-Salam Mohamed, leader of Jihad in Bangladesh.

El-Zawahri and Taha, who are believed to be in Afghanistan, top the Egyptian government's "most wanted" list.

"In the name of God, we urge Muslims everywhere to kill Americans, the soldiers of the devil," said the statement. It also condemned Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as an infidel, who it saidshould be overthrown by his own people, and urged the Iraqi military to do so.

A source close to the militant groups, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the American military threat against Iraq appeared to have created the right climate for militants to regain some sympathy, which they lost following last November's Luxor massacre. "The anger expressed by public opinion [at the threatened US military strike against Iraq] provided them [the militants] with an opportunity to regain lost sympathy, so they shifted their threats to America and Israel," the source said.

He added that despite differences between the Gama'a and Jihad, they have many points of agreement — particularly the concept of *jihad*.

"They have more agreements than disagreements," the source said. But this claim was quickly questioned by other analysts, who recalled the long history of disputes that kept the two clandestine groups apart.

"The two groups would never unite unless they are preparing a major operation, such as the killing of President Anwar El-Sadat in 1981," said Fouad Allam, a former head of the Interior Ministry's anti-terrorism department.

But at the time, Allam recalled, they never announced that they were closing ranks. In fact, they did the opposite, circulating rumours about their differences and accusing the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood of being a government lackey, he said.

But the 1981 unity was short-lived. Two years later, the two groups broke up as a result of differences between their jailed leaders. The latest statement was the first to be signed by the leaders of both groups since then.

Allam believes that the statement was an attempt to cover up the serious splits between the two groups and their individual weakness. "I think they are trying to hide their problems and pretend that they are still strong," he said.

On the other hand, the *fatwa* urging the killing of Americans and Jews is nothing new, Allam asserted. He recalled that since the early 1920s, Islamist militants targeted the British, then the Israelis and later the Americans. "The revival of this *fatwa* could be a response to criticism that they had not carried out any operations against Western targets and that they are products of Western regimes, which provide them with shelter and protection," Allam said.

Egyptian security forces have battled the militant groups since 1992 when they resumed acts of violence following the return of the Arab freedom fighters from Afghanistan. The militants targeted tourists, Copts, government officials and policemen.

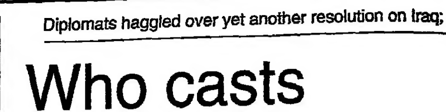
Last November, Gama'a militants carried out a massacre at Luxor's Hatshepsut Temple, in which 58 foreigners and four Egyptians were killed.

Interior Minister Habib El-Adli, who took over following the carnage, is devoting a major effort to activating bilateral security agreements and promoting a unified Arab anti-terrorism strategy.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

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A Palestinian woman passes by closed shops in East Jerusalem, on Tuesday, during a one-day general strike called by Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction "to protest Israel's policies in Jerusalem" as Israel hosted a world conference of mayors in the disputed city (photo: AFP)

Bungling without end

Fabricated reports about Syria, a botched assassination attempt in Amman, and now Bern. So incredible has Mossad bungling become, that some Israelis are crying "conspiracy". **Gamal Nkrumah** reports

Last Friday, Israel officially apologised to Switzerland for the recently-botched bugging operation in the Swiss capital Bern. Five Mossad agents were caught red-handed installing sophisticated listening devices in the supposed flat of suspected Shi'ite Hizbullah activist Abdallah Al-Zein, a Lebanese-born Swiss national. Al-Zein, a 32-year old electrician resident in Bern, no longer lives in the flat. His former wife, Patricia Vanini, was reported in the Israeli press as saying that "Mossad had mistaken information because he [Al-Zein] has not lived in the apartment for four years."

There has been much speculation in the Israeli press that the whole affair was a set up to oust Mossad chief Danny Yatom, who resigned last week in the wake of this and other recent debacles.

The strange irony is that of all secret services, Mossad has acquired a reputation for ruthless efficiency and precision in carrying out its international operations. But a string of bungled operations has blackened Mossad's reputation.

In December, Mossad agent Yehuda Gil was found to have falsified intelligence reports about Syria's intentions towards Tel-Aviv. Last September an assassination attempt against the political leader of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Khaled Misha'al, in the Jordanian capital Amman was badly botched. The Misha'al debacle provoked a storm of protest from Jordan and threatened to disrupt relations between the two countries.

Swiss authorities were initially conducting a discrete investigation of the Mossad bugging incident. But reports of the arrest of five Israeli nationals in Switzerland were leaked to the Israeli media.

"We would have preferred to wait a little bit longer before releasing any information to the media. It is also better to carry out investigations quietly and with very little publicity, but it seems there were those in Israel who wanted the details of this case leaked to the press," Viktor Schlumps, Swiss Justice and Police Ministry spokesman told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.



The Swiss authorities deny any attempts at a cover-up of what is seen in the Swiss media as a major illegal political and military espionage case. Yasmine Chatila, Swiss Foreign Affairs Ministry spokeswoman told the *Weekly*, "An investigation into the affair was proceeding quietly until the Israeli press leaked the information. The deed itself was criminal and unacceptable. Mossad's behaviour was a gross violation of Swiss sovereignty and international law."

The fiasco has shaken Israeli-Swiss relations. The Israeli ambassador in Bern was summoned to the Palais Fédérale and given a dressing down.

Swiss officials admitted on Friday that if the Israeli press didn't leak the story, they would not have made it public.

But there are those who subscribe to a rather intricate conspiracy theory to explain the latest Mossad bungle. "Mossad agents cannot be as stupid and noisy as to wake the neighbours up. It was as if they deliberately wanted to get caught. Their real mission was to create a scandal, a diplomatic row, to get rid of Yatom," an Israeli journalist told the *Weekly*.

There are rumours flying that Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu disliked Yatom from the start and that he would actually prefer to see the head of the Israeli Northern Military Command, Major General Amiram Levine, in charge of Mossad.

Yatom was the late Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin's political associate and is known to have strong Labour Party sympathies. Shimon Peres appointed Yatom as the director of Mossad just before the 1996 elections.

The Israeli media is inundated with reports that the less-hawkish Army Chief of Staff Amnon Shahak will soon be taking a top leadership role in the Labour Party as a political counterweight to Netanyahu. In a few months time there will be a routine reshuffle in the Israeli army and top army officials (including Shahak) will be retired and new ones appointed.

Round one to Libya

Despite US and British objections, the International Court of Justice has claimed the authority to decide where two Libyan suspects in the Lockerbie bombing should stand trial. **Rasha Saad** reports

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled last week that it has the jurisdiction to settle the deadlock between the United States, Britain and Libya over where two Libyans suspected of bombing a US airliner should be put on trial.

Thirteen out of the 15 ICJ justices — the American and British judges were the lone dissenters — ruled in favour of their right to judge the case. They declared that Libya's applications to the court were admissible even though they challenged the legality of UN Security Council resolutions, which imposed sanctions on Libya after the bombing.

It is worth noting that the ruling by the world court did not actually grant Libya's request for a trial or even address the crucial question of where a trial should be held. However, it gives Libya a chance to lobby for its proposal to try the two suspects in a neutral country.

In April 1992, the Security Council imposed sanctions on Libya for refusing to hand over to the US or Britain two Libyans suspected of bombing an American aircraft. The plane exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, killing 270 people.

Libya has denied any involvement in the bombing and refuses to extradite its two nationals to either the US or Britain for trial.

As a result, an air and arms embargo was imposed on Libya. Sanctions included the downgrading of diplomatic relations and a freeze on some Libyan assets abroad.

In an attempt to solve the dispute, Tripoli — supported by Arab and African countries — presented three alternative solutions:

— The suspects could be tried at the International Court of Justice in the Hague by Scottish judges and according to Scottish law;

— Trial in a third neutral country other than England or America;

— Establishing a special court to try the suspects in any country accepted by the Security Council.

All three options were rejected by the United States and Britain.

This uncompromising attitude has led Arab officials to suspect that US political motives are the main reason behind the sanctions. Some Arab observers believe that the sanctions are meant to pressure the Libyans until they revolt against Libyan leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi.

Others believe that the US — unable to guarantee a new pro-Western regime — only seeks to cripple the country, economically and politically.

For its part, Libya hailed the ICJ ruling, saying that it exposes the fabrications about international legitimacy put forward by the US and Britain. Libyan ambassador to the UN, Omar Dorda, said that Libya would be making presentations to the Security Council this week, based on the ruling. He said that he will not only ask the council to lift the sanctions when they come up for review in early March but will also demand compensation for damages from the sanctions imposed since 1992.

The ICJ decision was also hailed by Egypt, Syria and the Arab League as a step towards a possible resolution of the issue. Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid telephoned Gaddafi on Friday to congratulate him. Abdel-Meguid also met with Libyan Foreign Minister Omar Al-Montasser on Sunday to discuss means by which they should lobby the Security Council. Montasser said that Libya was working closely with the Arab League, the Organisation of African Unity, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement to reap the fruit of the ICJ decision.

Both Washington and Britain played down the importance of the ruling and insisted that sanctions on Libya will continue. British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said that the ruling is neither a victory nor a defeat; a White House spokesman said the ruling was simply a "technical decision by the court".

However, Arab League spokesman Talaat Hamed was guardedly optimistic about the verdict. He told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "The ruling by the ICJ proves the valid Arab stance on this issue and emphasises the fact that both the US and Britain have transformed their dispute from a legal, into a political one." He added that the ruling also proves that the Security Council adopted resolutions that violated article 36 of the UN charter, which stipulates that any legal disputes between nations should be referred first to the ICJ.

In March 1992, Libya filed a claim before the ICJ. It argued that according to the Montreal Convention on civil aviation law, the two suspects could be tried in Libya, their home country.

The court initially accepted the case and Libya presented its first official report in December 1993. It took the ICJ 18 months to respond in 1995. But during that time, the US and Britain were able to push a resolution against Libya through the Security Council. The court finally began official hearings on the Libyan petition in October 1997.

Diplomats haggled over yet another resolution on Iraq;

Who casts the first stone?

Hopeful about the agreement with Annan but wary of US and British intentions, the chief editor of the Iraqi daily *Al-Jumhuriya, in an exclusive interview,* makes a plea for an end to the genocidal sanctions against Iraq

Salah Mokhtar is editor-in-chief of Iraq's *Al-Jumhuriya* newspaper. He started his career as a political writer in 1961, specialising in the US policy in the Middle East, and produced several books on this issue. Five years ago he was appointed as editor of *Al-Jumhurvia*. Before that, he worked as assistant Arab League secretary-general when the Arab body was based in Tunis. He resigned after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 in protest of the Arab League's approval of the US-led alliance to liberate Kuwait.

Because of the rare statements by Iraqi officials, Mokhtar's front-page editorials are usually quoted by international news agencies and newspapers as an expression of the official line. Beside the classic official picture of the young Saddam, which is present in all government offices, Mokhtar's desk features a picture of himself shaking hands with the Iraqi president. Mokhtar's office also has four television sets, picking up CNN, BBC television, the French TV5, and perhaps surprisingly, Israeli television. Mokhtar can receive up to 150 television stations, "but these are the ones I prefer to watch all the time," he says.

What is your assessment of last week's agreement between Iraq and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan?

When the inspection teams start inspecting the presidential sites, they will discover that there is no and there were no weapons in those sites. This means that the Security Council should put an end to the blockade imposed on Iraq.

The economic embargo is related directly to the banned weapons, and when they consider there are no hidden weapons in those presidential sites — taking into account the thousands of rounds of inspection over the past seven years — they should decide whether to lift the embargo or not.

So, do you think the people celebrating in the streets now are hopeful that the embargo could be lifted?

Not only in the streets, the government and the masses in Iraq and the whole region is hopeful that the embargo will be lifted. This reflects a feeling everywhere that this problem has been exaggerated and it should be ended.

But do you really think the embargo will be lifted? There are several analyses which indicate that nothing will change as long as the present government remains in power.

This is different. This is what we would like to attract the world's attention to. We repeatedly said in the last seven years that the US as well as Britain have political objectives not related to the UN Security Council resolutions.

Until 1993, the US and Britain used to repeat that they want nothing but Iraq's implementation of the Security Council resolutions. Now, when they discovered that Iraq has reached the end of the process, they started talking about another objective, which is changing the government in Iraq. This objective supports the Iraqi view which is that Iraq has been subjected to atrocities and crimes under the banner of the UN while the reality is that the US and Britain have other political objectives not related to UN resolutions.

The US is not a world government to decide who should rule this or that country. We are living in a free world as they claim, but the reality is that we are witnessing the US practicing world dictatorship. Who gave the US government the right to impose a specific government on Iraq?

If they are really serious about spreading democracy throughout the world, they have to start to respect the right of nations to choose their governments. This is hypocrisy.

But do you believe that Iraq has already implemented all its obligations according to Security Council resolutions?

The crisis is purely a legal crisis which started after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. We withdrew from Kuwait; we recognised Kuwait as a state and we recognised its border; we accepted the principle of compensation and we have implemented, according to former UNSCOM Chairman (Ralph) Ekeus and the present Chairman (Richard) Butler, more than 85 per cent of our obligations.

But according to our belief, we have implemented 100 per cent of our obligations. Why do they keep delaying the lifting of the embargo and creating artificial crises from time to time just to justify the continuation of sanctions?

After Ms [Madeleine] Albright became secretary of state, she said officially and openly that the US will never accept lifting the embargo unless the present government is replaced by another government. Mr [Bill] Clinton in November last year repeated the same thing.

But do you think that the desire to change the government in Iraq is only limited to the US and Britain? There are other Arab countries who have publicly or secretly expressed similar feelings.

No one can change the situation in Iraq. This is an illusion. The last seven years proved that all American attempts, including the 1991 Gulf War, have failed to achieve this objective. Nearly 700,000 soldiers, with 500,000 Americans among them, with all their military capabilities and those of other countries such as Britain, France, and the 30 states which took part in that war, failed to achieve this objective.

On the fourth day of the war, [former US President George] Bush unilaterally declared a cease-fire. Why? Because he was afraid to see thousands of American soldiers die. The Iraqi resistance was very strong. He did not want to get involved in another Vietnam. The Americans have no capacity, except if they destroy the whole country by an atomic bomb, to topple the present government.

During the latest crisis, the US did not have the approval of any other country, except Kuwait, to bomb Iraq. Saudi Arabia showed signs that it was ready to normalise ties with Iraq under President Saddam Hussein. Sheikh Zayed of the UAE [United Arab Emirates], Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and all other Arab countries are willing to normalise ties with Iraq. But the direct pressure and threats of the US are the only deterrence. This is blackmail by the United States of America.

As for Egypt, we have, relatively speaking, very good ties. We have good developments with Syria and Iran. So, who is calling for a change for government in Iraq? Even if we suppose that there were some countries which support such opinion, who gave them the right to interfere in the business of the Iraqi people? It is an irony to talk about this issue.

The Americans and the British call for the respect of human rights. What does this mean? Is it only the right to speak freely? This is not freedom. The basic human right is the respect of the lives of the human beings. Without respecting that, you cannot respect political rights. A starving population cannot practice politics properly.

The first step towards respecting human rights, is to lift the embargo against Iraq, and not to commit a genocide as they are doing now. We lost 1.5 million human beings until now, not in the war, but because of the embargo. Nearly 20,000 Iraqi human beings die every month because of the lack of medicine and food.

After all this, who can convince us that the Western societies respect human rights? They give more attention to animals than to human beings.

But do you think that the Iraqi regime respects the rights of its own people?

This is not the issue. This is an internal matter. Does the government of Saudi Arabia respect the human rights of its people? Does the British government respect the right of the people in Northern Ireland? Do the US and Britain respect the lives of the Iraqis? Why did they use banned weapons such as depleted uranium against Iraqis during the [Gulf] War? Such weapons caused the so-called Gulf Syndrome, which we call the Curse of Iraq.

This is a slogan which no one could accept in countries subjected to atrocities. Human rights now is a minor issue for us. When the human being cannot guarantee his right to live, he or she does not think about their political rights. They would like first to guarantee their lives. My mother died two days ago because we could not find the medicine to treat her. If we found the medicine, she could have been alive now.

No one believes that the US or Britain respect human rights. This is a joke in Iraq and everywhere. They have a monarchy in Kuwait where women cannot even vote, and those who enjoy this right are the wealthy people only. In Kuwait, there are many degrees for citizenship. Is this democracy? Where are human rights here? Why don't they subject Kuwait to the same atrocities? At least in Iraq, we have one citizenship.

commentators debated the stand-off's winners and losers; in Iraq, the children continued to die. **Khaled Dawoud**, in Baghdad, reports on the destruction of a nation

The people caught in between

One week after Iraq's government signed its agreement with the United Nations, temporarily putting off the possibility of a US military strike against Baghdad, most Iraqis remain uncertain of their future

"There is no stability in our lives. It all depends on political developments coming from the United States," said Galal Sabry, a street vendor at the popular Shorja market in downtown Baghdad.

"Our future is uncertain. We cannot trust the Americans. They can launch another war against us at any time," he added.

The fact that the US continues to maintain a heavy military presence in the Gulf region adds to the fears of most Iraqis.

Washington said it will keep its troops on alert to ensure Iraq's respect of the recent agreement it signed with United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan granting "unconditional and unfettered" access to eight presidential sites where the Americans claimed that biological and chemical weapons were hidden.

For Iraqis, the agreement reached with Annan was a "victory", marking a growing world opposition to US threats to bomb their country.

"We were hopeful after reaching this agreement. But the American stand is making us very worried all the time," said Khaled Hussein, a government employee who was shopping at the same Shorja market.

He added that besides the fear of a new war, all Iraqis are mostly worried about their living conditions. Shortly before Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Hussein's monthly salary was 84 dinars — at the time one Iraqi dinar equaled US$3.

"I used to live well. I didn't worry about food or clothes," he said. After seven years of tight UN sanctions, leading to the virtual collapse of the Iraqi economy, the market exchange rate for one US dollar is 1,400 to 1,500 Iraqi dinars. Now Hussein's monthly salary is 3,500 Iraqi dinars, or slightly more than two dollars.

Before the embargo, a carton of 30 eggs used to cost 400 Iraqi fils, or less than half a dinar. Now, the same carton costs 3,000 dinars. The same goes for basic foodstuffs such as sugar, rice, wheat, tea, and cooking oil.

Iraqis were also known for favouring meat in most of their meals, including breakfast. A kilo of meat used to cost four dinars. Now, a kilo of meat costs 4,000 dinars, and most Iraqis admit with shame that they only have *falafel* sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

"Now, when one of my family members is sick, I panic. I don't know how I will be able to get the money for the medicine. In most cases, the medicine is not available, and if it is, it is very expensive," Hussein said.

Like most Iraqi government employees, who are probably the worst hit by the economic sanctions, Hussein works another job after his office hours, selling cigarettes. Others sell sweets, newspapers, and anything else which would allow them to make some extra money.

"Had it not been for the government food rations, we would have starved," said Yassin Ahmed, another government employee. "When I have a crisis in the family, I sell some of the wheat, rice or sugar we get from the government."

In the Friday street markets in Baghdad, Iraqis sell whatever they can to make some extra money. Television sets, radios, furniture, watches — nearly everything is on sale.

And nearly all cars in Iraq drive through the streets with a shattered front windshield. Some are so shattered that one wonders how the driver can see through them at all. "What can we do? We have no money to change them," said one driver.

Conservative Iraqi families also prevent their women from working or walking alone in the streets. "Because of poverty, many women have now turned to selling their bodies in order to be able to make a living. I will never allow my wife to work although she is a university graduate," said Ali Abdel-Hussein, a teacher.

But standing near a huge portrait of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (there is one on nearly every street in the country) one Iraqi expressed in a hushed voice what many fear to say in public.

"We are starving to death while Saddam is building more and more palaces. What are all these palaces for? Why doesn't he give us this money to buy food and medicine?" said the Iraqi citizen who, rather obviously, asked that his name be withheld.

"In Iraq, we cannot mention Saddam's name without saying: may God preserve him," said another Iraqi, who asked for dozens of assurances that his name would not be mentioned.

"We would like to leave. But one exit visa costs 400,000 dinars. For a family of five like mine, I need two million dinars. I will never get this money, and my only wish right now is to remain alive," he added.





An Iraqi woman mourns a young relative and curses the US during a funeral procession for dozens of children who died because of malnutrition(above), whereas, (left) Iraqi children are queuing at a food distribution center in Baghdad. *(photo: Reuters & AFP)*

Watching the children die

At Saddam's Hospital for Children, Iraqi doctors and nurses watch at least five of their patients die every day because of a lack of medicine

"It is extremely damaging... when a doctor feels that he can do nothing to save his patients," said Samir Kalander, the 40-year-old director of Saddam's Hospital for Children. "It affects our personality and morale when we feel that we don't know what to do. But we have no alternative but to continue working, trying to save as many lives as we can," he added.

In front of the hospital hundreds of Iraqi women impatiently queue, carrying malnourished children looking for treatment. Usually, none is available.

In the hospital's different units, newly born babies and others less than a year-old lie on their beds. Their mothers sit next to them doing nothing but praying to God and cursing the United States which, after seven years of economic sanctions, they blame for their suffering.

The hospital first opened in 1986 with space for 360 beds. Now, the hospital receives 2,000 patients daily with the admission rate to the emergency unit ranging anywhere between 100 to 200 cases.

According to Iraqi statistics, backed by international health organisations, an average of 4,904 children below the age of five died every month in 1997 due to malnutrition and lack of medicine. For children above the age of five, the figure is even worse, with 7,162 deaths per month during the same period. In a recently released report by UNICEF, 31 per cent of Iraqi children below the age of five suffer severe malnutrition.

"Our main problem is the shortage of medicine. It is not sufficient to treat the patients," Kalander said. Due to food shortages "all of Iraq's children suffer from one degree or another of malnutrition. Children are not receiving the necessary diet and babies are often born prematurely, or else below the proper weight. Mothers are also malnourished. So, when babies are delivered they are vulnerable to infections and any simple problem might result in a fatality."

The hospital also lacks the necessary spare parts to maintain its buildings and theatres. Of the four lifts in the seven-storey building only one works, though only for a few hours a day.

Syringes, which should be discarded after a single injection, are often used up to 10 times, according to Bahera Obeid, a nurse who has been working at the hospital since it was first opened. There are severe shortages of antibiotics, intravenous fluids, anti-toxic drugs, tranquilisers, "practically everything," according to Obeid.

Iraqis, who enjoyed a high standard of living before the 1991 Gulf War, are now prey to diseases, including cholera, polio and whooping cough, which were once on the verge of being eradicated.

Some 9,000 cases of cholera were reported last year, none in 1989. An increasing number of children are also suffering from cancer, leukaemia and limophthises. According to Dr Alaa Abdel-Mohsen, who works at the same hospital, incidents of leukaemia have increased 70 fold since sanctions took effect.

"Doctors have noticed that many forms of cancer in children have not been seen before in such young patients," according to Kalander.

"Most children come to our hospital only to die. We watch them dying, suffering severe pain, but we can't offer them treatment. Sometimes, we don't tell their families that we don't have the medicine, and may give them supportive therapy. But this lasts only until they die."

"These are children who are suffering. They are not politicians, they are victims. I blame those responsible for the sanctions for their suffering," he added.

The oil-for-food programme, in effect since 1996, had not led to any improvement in health conditions according to Kalander. The programme, which allows Iraq to sell $2 billion of oil every six months to buy food and medicine, is now in its third phase.

Yet out of the $2 billion, 30 per cent goes towards paying compensation to states and individuals harmed by the Gulf War. And out of the remaining $1.3 billion, $900 million goes to buying necessary foodstuffs, with only $200 million allocated to buying medicine and drugs, according to UN officials working in Iraq. The remaining $200 million covers the expenses of the various UN teams operating in the country.

But the real problem, according to Kalander, lies in the complicated procedures of the UN sanctions committee which has to approve every single contract requested by Iraq to buy medicine and food. "The amount is not enough, and the delays and complicated procedures (of the UN sanctions committee) means there is no continuous flow of medicine," he said.

Memorial to 'smart bombs'

The Ameryah shelter, bombed by the United States during the 1991 Gulf War, stands as a chilling reminder of the human cost exacted by America's sophisticated arsenal

Umm Ghaidaa lost nine relatives, including her two children on Tuesday, 14 February, 1991, when a bomb shelter in the upmarket district of Ameryah, on the outskirts of Baghdad, was bombed. Dressed in black and wearing a chain with a picture of her daughter, Ghaidaa, attached, she now receives visitors to the huge Finnish-built shelter at the entrance of the building.

Since the death of her family, she has been living in the small room at the entrance of the shelter originally built for the porter. She refuses to tell visitors her real name. "I am just *Umm* (the mother of) Ghaidaa. Since my daughter and son, my sister, her two children and four nephews died I have no name. It does not exist any more," she said.

When *Umm* Ghaidaa speaks she does not look at the person she is talking to. She recalls the memories of that horrible day as if a recorded message is being played.

"I went out just an hour before the bombing, which took place at 4.30pm. I went to wash some clothes, and I came back to find all my family killed. I could not even find the remains of my daughter Ghaidaa. Her body melted."

Given American claims that their bombing of the shelter was a "mistake", one might imagine Al-Ameryah shelter to be some underground complex or a small hidden building. It is not. It is a huge building, standing alone in grounds that cover more than an acre. "Mistake," when you stand in front of the building, becomes a ghoulishly unconvincing euphemism.

Upon entering the shelter, *Umm* Ghaidaa asks visitors to read *Al-Fatiha* (the opening *sura* of the Qur'an) or draw a cross. Then she begins to tell the details of the crime.

There are 44 similar shelters in Iraq, 33 built by a Finnish company and 10 built by Sweden. The Iraqi government decided to build the shelters shortly after Israel bombed Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981 and as the Iran-Iraq war reached its peak, with long-range missiles targeting the heart of Baghdad.

The shelters have five-tonne doors which close automatically in case of chemical attack. The underground floor includes water tanks, toilets, showers and supply rooms. The top floor was reserved for accommodation, with rows of three-storey beds. Now the beds are gone. What is left are pictures of the families who were killed in the rocket attack, hanging on the walls and surrounded by the flowers left by visitors who two weeks ago marked the seventh anniversary of the death of their loved-ones.

Since men above the age of 18 were serving in the army at the time, the photographs are mostly of babies, women and children. The pictures of each family are placed together in a frame with their names and ages.

This is a family of nine all gone, a family of six all gone, a family of four all gone, *Umm* Ghaidaa goes on and on.

"This is Ghaidaa, can you see her beautiful smile? She was 13. She is the weapon which the Americans said was hidden in Ameryah."

Americans, using their "smart bombs" used two guided missiles to blow up the shelter. The first rocket drilled a hole in the shelter's thick ceiling, preparing for the second rocket. There were 1,200 people inside the shelter. When the rockets hit, the place turned into an overheated oven, with temperatures of over 4,000 degrees. The heat was so intense that the five-ton doors melted.

"Look at the ceiling, these are prints of hands and legs which hit the ceiling and were stuck there after the bombing. This is the print of the body of a young woman who was stuck to the wall, and this is the print of a mother who was holding her baby," *Umm* Ghaidaa said.

Nor was the situation better for those on the underground floor at the time of the attack. The rockets blew up the hot water tanks, boiling alive all those who were down there. Again, pointing at the walls, "this is the skin of those who were killed stuck to the wall, this is the pupil of an eye, this the print of a spinal cord."

Beside residents of Al-Ameryah who had taken refuge in the shelter, Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian families were among the victims.

"If this was a military base, why did the Americans, with all their technology, not bomb it in the morning when there was nobody staying at the shelter," *Umm* Ghaidaa said. When told that Western reports stated that only 640 people were killed, she said this was not true. "We registered the names of all those who were staying at the shelter, and there were 1,200. But many bodies totally melted and nothing remained of them. In the other cases, we only found a hand or a leg."

The last pictures shown by *Umm* Ghaidaa were of the Cable News Network (CNN) cameraman filming the remains. "CNN said minutes after the bombing that this was not a military shelter. But, so what? Will this bring Ghaidaa and Mustafa back? They were killed by the criminal [former US President George] Bush."

War deferred but the carnage goes on

A United Nations official said that seven years of tight economic sanctions against Iraq have done damage to nearly all aspects of life in a country where 23 million people once enjoyed a high standard of living

The oil-for-food deal allowed Iraq to sell $2.4 billion worth of oil every six months (now raised to $5.2) to buy food and medicine. But due to the complicated procedures of the UN sanctions committee, many approved contracts to provide food and medicine were delayed and goods were not delivered.

According to Denis Halliday, the UN co-ordinator in Iraq responsible for overseeing the implementation of the oil-for-food deal, the sanctions committee has in the past blocked the purchase of pencils, cotton sheets and ambulances because they might be used for military purposes. Pencils containing graphite and cotton sheets, apparently, might be used to make military fatigues.

"But what frustrated us most was the blocking of the ambulances. There are practically no ambulances left in Iraq yet it took six months for us to get just six. Now 39 have arrived, and 200 have finally been approved. I think the minimum we need is 1,000," Halliday said.

Following the latest crisis between Iraq and the US over access for UN weapons inspection teams to presidential sites, the Security Council approved a new resolution allowing the increase in Iraqi oil sales to $5.2 billion.

Iraq said it would not be able to produce more than $4 billion worth of oil because of the deterioration of its production and pumping facilities. The UN expects the new programme to go into effect by the end of March, following further consultations with Baghdad.

But if the increase in oil production is to become a reality, Halliday insists, the sanctions committee has to approve Iraq's long standing request to purchase production and pumping equipment and spare parts.

During UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's latest visit to Baghdad, he met with top Iraqi officials and promised to encourage the sanctions committee to agree to the spare parts. "That would be a tremendous breakthrough for everybody concerned," Halliday said.

"It is a vicious circle. If you don't pump and sell, then you have no revenues and cannot purchase basic goods."

One result of this dilemma is that 31 per cent of Iraqi children below five years, and 30 per cent of adults, suffer chronic malnutrition. "The damage done by this cannot be repaired easily," he said, particularly the concomitant "damage to the development of learning capacities, reading skills, and so on, which clearly is very tragic. We have diminished the education system in this country through sanctions," Halliday added.

"Now you have a generation of young Iraqis coming up attending schools where the system has collapsed, there is no heat, no sanitation, and often there are no books or paper. So, there is a huge potential for young people not being able to develop and grow into useful citizens as they would have done without the sanctions."

On another level, many young professionals educated overseas have left. "There is a massive brain drain in Iraq. There are hundreds of thousands of professionals who have left the country for opportunities oversees," Halliday said.

It is estimated that some 5,000 Iraqis have gone to Malaysia, 25-30,000 to Libya and hundreds of thousands to Europe and North America, according to the UN official.

"That's a tremendous loss. These people are teachers, engineers, architects, technologists. What is more tragic, however, is that there are good people still in this country, but there is no professional work for them," he said.

When UN agencies advertised for jobs as drivers, Halliday said, applicants often had masters degrees. "They should be doing something more useful and productive for Iraq. The unemployment rate here is horrific."

According to Halliday deteriorating living conditions were not only affecting poor Iraqis, but also the middle classes, and even top officials. "It is not just the people whom you see begging for a couple of dinars at traffic lights. It is everybody. You find the most senior government officials depending on the assistance provided by the oil-for-food deal," Halliday said.

"Iraqi officials and technocrats are an outstanding group of individuals, highly committed and motivated to make the best out of the difficult situation they face. They have a tremendously difficult job to make things work under very difficult circumstances and personal difficulties in terms of income and family needs," he added.

"Many of them feel humiliated by this programme [oil-for-food]. The thought of food baskets for an old and proud country that goes back to Mesopotamia is for many of them a tremendous humiliation. They resent the fact that we are here assessing their needs, controlling their purchases and monitoring their distribution system," the UN official said.

Deteriorating living conditions have been accompanied by the breakdown of Iraq's transportation system and manufacturing base. "The economy," Halliday insists, "has collapsed due to the imposition of sanctions."

After Iraq increases its oil sales, according to the newly approved Security Council plan, the UN hopes to increase Iraqi food purchases from the current level of $900 million to $1.5 billion.

"My estimate is that we need twice that. That still keeps people at the very basic level of needs such as wheat, rice, sugar, tea, cheese and powdered milk."

He added that foodstuffs such as chicken, meat or eggs are now "luxury items, which would not have been the case before the sanctions." Purchases of medicine should also increase from the current $200 million to $776 million, according to the new oil-for-food plan.

Seven years of sanctions have also meant an increasing sense of "isolation and alienation" among young Iraqis who can no longer afford to travel and do not have access to new books, technology or any sort of information.

"These are the young men and women who are going to be the leaders of this country, and this sense of isolation is going to have an impact on the future of relations between Iraq, its neighbours and the rest of the world," Halliday said.

The UN official concluded that "sanctions do not work. They have a devastating impact on small people, innocent people... There has to be a better way for the international community to deal with member states who act improperly."

"Sanctions enhance the leadership. If you have people worrying about schools, their kids and providing them with food and drugs, they will have no time to worry about the government... They worry about survival."

Capital punishment

Noam Chomsky on the shackles the free movement of capital leaves behind

At the end of World War II, the United States was in a position of power and wealth with no historical precedent. It used this power to organise the world in accord with the interests of dominant elements of the domestic society. In the words of the noted diplomatic historian Gerald Haines, also the senior historian of the CIA, "the United States assumed, out of self-interest, responsibility for the welfare of the world capitalist system."

A central part of that task was the design of an international economic order — called "the Bretton Woods (BW) system" referring to the 1944 conference at Bretton Woods where the major institutions and framework were developed by the US and Britain. Their goal is commonly described as the construction of an open, liberal economic order, but that is only partially accurate. The BW system was designed to liberalise trade, but not capital movements, which were to be regulated and controlled. The function of the International Monetary Fund was to facilitate these arrangements.

There were two basic reasons for this decision. The first was the belief that liberalisation of finance often interferes with liberalisation of trade, a high priority for the US in a period of vast manufacturing surpluses and capital resources. The second was the recognition that free movement of capital would undermine government decision-making, and also the welfare state, which had enormous popular support. As Roosevelt's representative Harry Dexter White explained the common understanding, without capital controls governments would be unable to conduct fiscal and social policies because of "flights of capital, motivated either by prospect of speculative exchange gain, or desire to avoid inflation, or evade taxes." Not merely the social contract that had been won by long and hard struggle, but even substantive democracy, require control on capital movements.

The BW system remained largely in place until the early 1970s, when the Nixon administration dismantled it. This was a major factor in the enormous explosion of capital flows in the years that followed. Foreign exchange transactions rose from $18 billion a day 20 years ago to over $1 trillion a day in 1995, 40 times the daily value of international trade, dwarfing the capital reserves of the most powerful states.

The composition also changed radically. In 1970, 90 per cent of transactions were related to the real economy (trade and long-term investment), and 10 per cent were speculative. By 1990, those figures had reversed, and by 1995 it was estimated that 95 per cent is speculative, most of it very short-term. Meanwhile, the rich (OECD) countries ended capital controls.

The results generally confirm the expectations of Bretton Woods. There has been a serious attack on social support systems and a significant increase in protectionism and other market interventions, led primarily by the Reagan administration. Markets have been far more volatile, with a sharp rise in dangerous crises. The IMF virtually reversed its functions from constraining financial mobility to enhancing it while serving as debt manager for the rich.

It was predicted at once, notably by Nobel Prize laureate in economics James Tobin, that financial liberalisation would lead to a low-growth, low-wage economy in the advanced industrial societies. That has happened, too. For the past 25 years, growth rates have declined sharply in the OECD countries. In the US, wages and income have stagnated or declined for the majority of the population, while the top few per cent have gained enormously. Inequality has returned to levels of 70 years ago. UNICEF's 1997 review of the world reveals that the US has the worst record among the industrial countries, ranking alongside Cuba by such standards as mortality for children under five, and also holding records for hunger, child poverty, and other social maladies. Similar though less extreme effects can be found throughout the OECD.

The effects have been far more grim in the Third World. Comparison of East Asia and Latin America is illuminating. Latin America has the world's worst record for inequality, East Asia ranks among the best. The same holds for education, health, and social welfare generally. Imports to Latin America have been heavily skewed towards consumption for the rich; in East Asia, towards productive investment. Capital flight in Latin America approached the scale of the crushing debt; in East Asia it was tightly controlled. In Latin America, the wealthy are generally exempt from social obligations, Brazilian economist Bresser Perera points out: its problem is "subjection of the state to the rich." East Asia differed sharply.

The only Latin American country considered a possible candidate for joining Asia's "Tigers," Chile, is an interesting case. The free market experiment of the Pinochet dictatorship led to utter disaster by the early 1980s. Since then, the economy has recovered with a mixture of state intervention (including the nationalised copper firm, a leading exporter) and controls on short-term capital movements.

More recently, financial liberalisation has spread to Asia. The most important of the Tigers, South Korea, removed capital controls to qualify for entry into the OECD. That is widely regarded as a significant factor in the recent crisis in South Korea, as in the region generally, along with a range of market failures, corruption, and structural problems.

The problem of capital flight is not limited to the Third World. After World War II, there was a massive flow of capital from Europe to the US. Cooperative capital controls could have kept the funds at home for the reconstruction of Europe, but US policy makers preferred to have wealthy Europeans send their capital to New York banks, with the costs of reconstruction transferred to US taxpayers. The device was called "the Marshall Plan", which approximately covered the "mass movements of nervous flight capital" that leading economists had predicted, and that took place.

For Third World countries that have been unable to control their own wealthy classes, the debt — which grows rapidly despite huge interest payments — is a stranglehold on development and social policy. There has been consideration of debt relief or cancellation. That would not be unprecedented. When the US took over Cuba 100 years ago it cancelled Cuba's debt to Spain on the grounds that it was an "odious debt," with no legal or moral standing because it had been imposed upon the people of Cuba without their consent, and had served to repress them. The same argument extends to the current Third World debt. Another option is the capitalist principle that responsibility falls upon those who borrow and lend. The money was not borrowed by campesinos, workers, and slum-dwellers; they gained little or nothing from it: indeed they often suffered grievously from its effects. But they are the ones who are held responsible for repayment, along with US taxpayers, not the banks who made bad loans or the economic and military elites who enriched themselves while transferring their wealth to banks in New York and London.

The debt is a social and ideological construct, not a simple economic fact. Furthermore, as understood long ago, capital flight serves as a powerful weapon against social justice and democracy, even free trade. There is nothing inevitable about these consequences. Technical devices to alleviate their worst effects were proposed years ago, but have been dismissed by powerful interests that benefit, whatever the human costs. More generally, these effects result from decisions made within human institutions that must face the test of legitimacy, and if they do not meet it, can be replaced by others that are more free and more just, as often in the past.

Roger and out

Roger Garaudy was absent Friday when a Paris court sentenced him to a total fine of 120,000 francs for "racial defamation" and "contesting the reality of crimes against humanity". **Peter Snowdon** reports from Paris on the reign of the pensée unique

The Garaudy trial reached at least a provisional conclusion on Friday, when the 17th court of the Tribunal Correctional in Paris pronounced judgement on the author of *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics* and his first publisher, Pierre Guillaume. The judgement, while clear in its rhetoric and terms, still left enough margin of ambiguity for Roger Garaudy's lawyer, Jaques Verges, to describe it as a "first victory" for his client. What his next victory may be is uncertain, to say the least, given such a precedent.

Guillaume and Garaudy escaped six months' imprisonment on the grounds that the first edition was sold only by subscription to regular customers of Guillaume's, and was thus not a sufficiently "public" act. On the four other charges brought against the writer for the second edition, published at his own expense in 1996, the court found Garaudy innocent of "incitation to racial discrimination, hatred or violence", but guilty of "racial defamation" for the passages of the book denouncing the "Shoah business", and of "contesting the reality of crimes against humanity", for his arguments denying the genocidal intentions and actions of the Nazi regime. He was condemned to a total fine of 120,000 francs (approximately LE70,000) on four counts. The philosopher immediately made it known that he would appeal against the judgement "on principle".

While the court was grandly declaring Garaudy innocent of inciting racial violence, outside the courthouse the French police proved themselves (once more) incapable of preventing racial violence from actually breaking out. A group of young Zionist extremists taunted Garaudy's supporters before attacking them. Insults were exchanged on both sides. Six people are to bring charges against their aggressors, as well as two Arab journalists, one Egyptian and one Saudi Arabian, who were attacked a little later as they attempted to take the Metro. An organisation known as Betar-Tagar sent a communiqué to AFP in which they claimed responsibility for the attacks, declaring that "following the expression of anti-Semitic and revisionist ideas by Garaudy's friends, the negativists were punished."

Eagerly awaited throughout the Arab world, the Garaudy judgement seems to have left France — or at least the French — largely indifferent. If *Le Monde* accorded the fate of the "former Communist Party theorist" two-thirds of a page in its Sunday edition, most other newspapers confined themselves to a brief item recording the terms of the judgement and noting the fracas that followed.

This lack of interest has many causes. While Garaudy has been elevated, perhaps too rapidly, to the status of martyr-in-waiting for many Muslims, he had long since managed to alienate the sympathy of almost all his compatriots in his earlier incarnations as authoritarian Catholic and Stalinist ideologue. He is perceived here, by those who know anything about him, not as a victim of Western hypocrisy about "free speech", but as an opportunist, who takes advantage of democratic liberties to advance his own essentially anti-democratic ideas, and who (fortunately), has always been more interested in self-promotion than in obtaining real power. As one political observer, who asked not to be named, told the *Weekly*: "All Garaudy needs to do now to completely discredit himself, is convert to Judaism." And he added, "I wouldn't put it past him."

The French are also suffering from an overdose of political and politically-inspired trials: the trial of the former Vichy police chief, Maurice Papon, is turning into a soap opera to rival that of Klaus Barbie: almost every week, a new political scandal is uncovered concerning the previous or present government; and above all, the country is currently rocked by a series of cases of paedophilia and child abuse. In this context, in which history is being rewritten every day by lawyers and judges, it is hardly surprising that for most people the truth seems to be receding rapidly behind the horizon, and their interest with it. The more litigation is carried on, and the more comprehensively the media report each stage in every drama, the harder it seems to be to know who really did what, when, to whom, or why any of it really matters.

The result is a particularly insidious form of "virtue". As the writer of one letter to *Le Monde* this week pointed out, in reference to the countless introspective cases in which history is put on trial: "The aim of the operation is to neutralise any real interrogation of the present. Since yesterday is now a convicted criminal, we know that we today are just, and at least that everything is for the best in the least bad of worlds. In this way, history is transformed into a hegemonic ideology, *la pensée unique*, whose only goal is to vindicate Western 'civilisation'."

There is no clearer example of this trend than the Gayssot Law under which Garaudy has been convicted. The judgement of the court is, in this sense, a tour-de-force: while admitting that Garaudy was free to make a "political or ideological critique of Zionism and the actions of the Israeli state," or to engage in a "public and scientific debate" relative to the existence or otherwise of the Nazi gas chambers, it nevertheless condemned him for claiming that the Holocaust had been manipulated by the International Jewish community for certain political ends, and for denying systematically the existence of Nazi crimes against humanity. Which is rather like saying that he can say what he wants, as long as he doesn't say *that*.

Just as some Arab intellectuals have warned against taking Garaudy as an easy emblem of the Arab cause, so there are some French intellectuals who see the Gayssot Law as an essentially totalitarian and anti-historic act, which serves to confirm the inability of Europe to envisage its past objectively. Either we are the priest saints, or the biggest criminals, in history. In either case, nobody else comes anywhere near us. The Gayssot Law, with an essentially criminal elegance, even allows us to have it both ways.

But in France, this whole territory is taboo — not only for the French. As one young Paris-based Algerian told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "There are things we can't say out loud here, because we're in France. But that doesn't mean we don't think them. Ask X or Y: you'll see, they're all with Garaudy, all the way."



Sharad Pawar, main architect of Congress Party's surprise victory over the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in the western Indian state of Mahrashtra. India's Hindu nationalist BJP topped national elections Tuesday but fell short of a majority in a badly-fractured parliament, condemning the world's largest democracy to a new bout of political turmoil *(photo: Reuters)*

All roads lead to Tehran

Iran's international political isolation is slowly but surely coming to an end, writes **Abul-Maati El-Sandoubi** from Rome

Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini's three-day visit to Tehran on Sunday signalled a formal end to the European Union's (EU) political boycott of Iran, which started last April after a German court found the Iranian government guilty of ordering the killing of four Kurdish opposition members in a Berlin restaurant in 1992.

Emerging from an hour-long meeting with his Iranian counterpart, Kamal Kharrazi, Dini enthusiastically declared that Iran and Europe have entered a new era of cooperation marked by "an open dialogue on all matters of common concern." Confirming the Italian minister's assessment, Kharrazi said that "the era of criticising one another is over. Now is the time to cooperate. We should look to the future and increase the fields of cooperation and promote mutual understanding between Iran and Europe."

Beyond the goodwill speeches and the official posturing, the Italian minister rushed to Tehran to outmanoeuver and outdo the French in boosting trade ties with the Islamic Republic. The Italian daily *La Stampa* suggested that Rome had to move in fast, especially in the wake of considerable French and German investments in the oil-rich country. The EU is a major trading partner with Iran and has resisted moves by the US, particularly the 1996 Iran-Libya sanctions act, to starve Iran of vital investment in its oil and gas reserves. "Both Iran and the EU are victims of US extraterritorial laws. Therefore, they should expand mutual cooperation to reduce the US manoeuverability," wrote the Iranian English-language daily *The Tehran Times*.

Political analysts believe this new chapter in Irani-European relations to be particularly significant in the wake of Kofi Annan's visit to Baghdad — averting an imminent US attack on Iraq. Directly challenging the US-imposed boycott of so-called "rogue states" in the region — including Iraq, Sudan, Libya and Iran — the Italian foreign minister's visit seemed to indicate that the EU increasingly distances itself from US policy positions in the Middle East. Earlier this week, EU foreign ministers said several encouraging developments in Iran, including the election last May of moderate cleric Mohamad Khatami to the presidency, required a positive policy response from the Europeans. Explicitly rejecting the American allegations of Iran's supposed involvement in "international terrorism", Dini emphasised that "Iran's sponsorship of terrorism was a thing of the past."

Indeed, the new EU position differs sharply from US policy which sanctions large investments in Iran by any country on the grounds that Iran sponsors and exports "terrorism" around the world. Referring to the conventional American litany of woes against Iran, President Khatami retorted by obliquely accusing the US of using state terrorism by threatening to strike Iraq. "We are strongly opposed to violence as a means to an end — whether it is used by governments against nations or individuals against each other," explained Khatami.

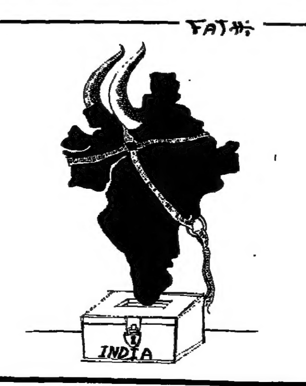
Meanwhile, European investment prospects appear forthcoming: "Iran's doors are open for top EU officials to visit our country. Likewise our top officials should proceed on visits to Europe to pave the ground for further consolidation of ties," wrote *The Tehran Times*.

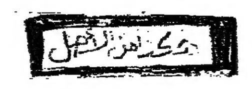
Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

FATHI









Fawzi Al-Qawuqji: Yesterday's hero

To those who still remember him, today, his name is synonymous with the bitter taste of defeat: of hope deferred, then disappointed. But he was a hero, then, write **Mona Anis** and **Omayma Abdel-Latif**: the man who would liberate Palestine



Fawzi Al-Qawuqji's name is probably unknown to anyone too young to have lived through the events of 1948. During the months preceding May of that year, however, his name, along with that of the leader of the Palestinian guerrillas, Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini, entered the hearts of the common people on Arab streets. They chanted his name in demonstrations, and bestowed upon him the legendary status of a saviour.

He was the leader of the Arab Liberation Army (ALA), a voluntary force of some few thousand Arab irregulars formed to help Palestinians resist the partition of their homeland after a recommendation made by the Arab League in December 1947. Unlike Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini, whose martyrdom in Al-Qastel Battle in April 1948 lent his name a lasting glow, Al-Qawuqji lived on, long after the humiliating defeat of the Arabs, regulars and irregulars, to see his name ridiculed as it became synonymous with empty talk.

When he died in Beirut in December 1976 — he was Lebanese, although at the time of his birth there was no such a thing as a Lebanese nationality — few remembered him. But the PLO executive committee, still in Beirut at that time, issued a statement mourning his death and recognising the "role he played on the land of Palestine".

Quite why Al-Qawuqji became the figure on whom people pinned their hopes when his record on the battlefield was nothing but one defeat after another is a question beyond the scope of this article. It would seem, however, that part of the celebrity surrounding his name was due to his constant defiance of the dominant powers. A perpetual rebel, he participated in almost every major Arab revolt during the first half of this century.

He graduated from the Military Academy in Constantinople in 1912, fought in the first world war, then returned to his native Tripoli. There he met Prince Faisal, the son of the Sherif Hussein, the leader of the first Arab revolt. Faisal asked him to join the Arab forces marching to Damascus under his command, where they intended to establish an Arab state. He fought the French in the battle of Maisloun, in Syria, and in 1925 participated in the Mount Lebanon revolt, led by Sultan Al-Atrash against the French. Following the quashing of the revolt, he went to live in Saudi Arabia, where he remained until 1932. In the kingdom, however, he fell out with King Abdel-Aziz, who had him arrested and then expelled.

In Baghdad, he entered the Military Academy for further studies and remained there as an officer in the Iraqi army until his departure to Palestine in 1936. The revolution had broken out, and he led guerrilla operations against the British and Zionist gangs until the revolution, too, was crushed. On his return to Baghdad in 1941, he joined Rashid Ali Al-Kilani's movement against the British, and fought fiercely on the Jordanian borders against the Transjordan Army, led by General John Glubb, the foremost British officer in the Middle East, who was wounded in one of these battles. Later, Al-Qawuqji was seriously injured on the battlefield and was taken to Germany. There he underwent treatment, met and married his German wife, and remained until the end of the second world war.



القاوقجي يتحدى امريكا



الهجوم على فلسطين

يبدأ في الاسبوع المقبل

١٠ مليمات

الأهرام

تأهب القوات العربية للزحف على فلسطين

خطة حرب التحرير - مهمة الجيوش النظامية - دمشق مقر القيادة

بيان مندوب مصر

عن تأليف لجنة اقتصادية للشرق الاوسط

Clockwise:
***Al-Ahram* of Feb. 15, 1948 announcing "Arab forces preparing to march on Palestine"; a news item announcing "Qawuqji challenges America"; Qawuqji inspecting his forces in Palestine; Azam Pasha, secretary-general of the Arab League, with the Grand Mufti Amin Al-Husseini outside the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo; and a news item announcing "Attack on Palestine begins next week"**

The story of his return to the Arab world after the end of the war is a series of adventures, and it is only thanks to top-secret British documents, released only last year, that we know the true story of his flight from Germany to France, his narrow escape from arrest in Palestine, and his arrival in Cairo on 23 February 1947.

The documents at the British Public Records Office prove that Al-Qawuqji's name was legendary not only among the common people, but among the British authorities as well. The British, however, considered him not a hero but a dangerous man, and exerted every effort in attempting to stop him. On his way from Paris to Cairo, the plane carrying him was diverted to Lydda Airport, and a British officer accompanied by a Hebrew soldier boarded in search of Al-Qawuqji. If they failed to recognise him, it was only because he was sitting next to his wife, speaking in German.

In the House of Commons, British Colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones was asked what would have happened if the British authorities had been able to identify Al-Qawuqji in Lydda. Creech Jones revealed: "Had security forces recognised him they would have done something, but he remained in Lydda Airport for only one hour. He was carrying a false passport and his luggage was registered under a different name."

A telegram to London from the British ambassador in Cairo, dated 1 March 1947, provides further details of Al-Qawuqji's arrival in Egypt: "Fawzi arrived in Almaza [Cairo] airport on 23 February. Upon our request his name was put on the black list, hence the passport officer refused to grant him a permit to leave the airport." After some argument, the ambassador continued, Al-Qawuqji persuaded the officer to let him talk to Abdel-Rahman Azam Pasha, and the Secretary-general of the Arab League instructed the officer to grant him a 24-hour visa. Then Azam phoned Nuqrashi Pasha, the Egyptian prime minister, who feared the news of Al-Qawuqji's arrival. At first Nuqrashi refused to allow Fawzi to stay in Egypt, and asked that he leave immediately. But Azam drew his attention to the fact that any cruelty against Fawzi "must remain within limits, as he is a national hero." Finally, Nuqrashi agreed that Al-Qawuqji spend four days in Egypt. "He is now residing at the Hotel Continental," the ambassador wired, "and will be leaving to Beirut midnight tomorrow."

From Lebanon Al-Qawuqji made his way to Syria, where on 3 November 1974 the British chargé d'affaires in Damascus reported to the Foreign Office that his American counterpart had been to tea with Al-Qawuqji at the house of his host, Ahmed Al-Sharabati. The British official noted with not a little spite: "He is living in a plush house in the best neigbourhood in Damascus, owned by Sharabati, the minister of defence, who gives him a monthly allowance of 1,000 lire."

Al-Sharabati's generosity, he told the American diplomat, was due to the fact that "he is rich while his friend is poor." As for the encounter with Al-Qawuqji himself, the American diplomat had apparently learned that the regular armies of the Arab countries would be inefficient, "as the Arab countries are divided among themselves and cannot fight a united battle." People's war is the solution, the Arab revolutionary revealed, adding that he had "great experience in that kind of war". The British chargé d'affaires concluded that, according to his American colleague, it was that Al-Qawuqji was exerting every effort in preparing for this project, which he had returned to carry out.

On 2 February 1948, *Al-Ahram* published an interview conducted by the UP correspondent in Damascus, Samir Souqi, with Fawzi Al-Qawuqji. The UP correspondent described the headquarters as follows: "This Arab leader, motivated by utmost resolve, has made of his home a military headquarters guarded by irregulars in American military uniform. Not an hour of the day passes without Bedouins, peasants and young men in modern clothes turning up on his doorstep, demanding to enlist as volunteers in the Arab Liberation Army. He also has headquarters in Qatanah, where volunteers are undergoing military training, waiting to be sent to Palestine. He refused to let me visit the place, though, which no journalist has ever seen. In his house there is a special room entered only by trusted people: the room of his aide-de-camp, Mahmoud Al-Rifa'i, a graduate of the Potsdam Military Academy. While we were talking, Taha Al-Hashimi Pasha, whom military experts say is one of the greatest military leaders in the Arab world, entered. Al-Qawuqji asked to be excused and took him to another room. I noticed that Al-Hashimi was carrying several large maps of Palestine."

Al-Qawuqji told the UP reporter: "American policy on the partition of Palestine threatens all American interests throughout the Middle East. How on earth can America think of laying pipelines in the region now? They have angered the Arabs so much that now they will never be able to carry out a single project."

The tension rose further, and Al-Qawuqji's plans made front-page headlines. *Al-Ahram* of 9 February reported: "Attack on Palestine begins next week." Below the headline, *Al-Ahram*'s special correspondent in Damascus wrote: "Well-informed sources reveal that the Arab leaders have decided to stage the first phase of their attack on the Jews in Palestine in the coming week. The same sources reveal that Ismail Safwat Pasha [head of the technical committee formed by the Arab League] has been appointed general commander of the Arab Liberation Army, while Fawzi Al-Qawuqji has been appointed commander of the forces stationed in Syria and Lebanon." *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent added: "Instead of the scattered battles that have taken place in Palestine until now, Palestine will be divided into three main fronts, so that military operations can be coordinated according to a master plan. Al-Qawuqji will command a front including northern Palestine and the coastline, including Haifa, Jaffa and Tel Aviv. He is now in Beirut, working on the final details of his plan."

The other two fronts, the correspondent wrote, "will be Jerusalem and southern Palestine. The Grand Mufti, *Hajj* Amin Al-Husseini, will designate the leader of the Jerusalem front. It is said that the post will go to Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini, while the southern front will be placed under the command of an Egyptian leading battalions of Egyptian volunteers as well as Libyans and the Bedouins of the Sinai Peninsula." The report concluded: "Of course, Taha Al-Hashimi Pasha who has been appointed General Inspector of the Arab Liberation Army will be supervising the overall logistics."

On 15 February, *Al-Ahram*'s main banners announced: "Arab forces preparing to march on Palestine. Plans for the war of liberation. The regular armies' mission. Damascus to be the Arab Army Command headquarters." Below, the paper's correspondent in Beirut reported: "The Arab forces are ready to launch the Jihad outside and inside Palestine according to a master plan, to be implemented in several phases." He added: "Four thousand *mujahidin* [guerrillas] are fighting alongside the Palestinians inside the country, while hundreds of others are awaiting the orders of General Ismail Safwat to cross the borders under the command of Fawzi Al-Qawuqji."

The reporter went on to discuss the positions of the Arab regular armies: "On the southern front, Egyptian forces are stationed in Al-Arish and Rafah near the coast. Behind them are small Egyptian units stationed at various posts along the Egyptian-Palestinian borders." As for the Transjordan Army, the *Al-Ahram* correspondent in Beirut did not neglect to mention that "some of the units of that army are cooperating with the British troops". As for the Syrian and Lebanese armies, he noted: "Their forces constantly patrol the borders and carry out frequent military maneuvers before the Zionist settlements."

Though the role of these regular armies, reported *Al-Ahram*, "is not yet clear: there is speculations that they will enter the Arab areas evacuated by the British troops, and supervise from there the military operations carried out by the Arab Liberation Army." He added: "It is also possible, however, that these armies will engage in combat with the Zionists. Informed sources, however, assert that the Arab countries will not send their armies to fight inside Palestine as they are members of the UN. The sole mission of the Arab armies will be to police the area in order to cut off any weapons or food supplies to the Zionists in Palestine."

In an interview in *Le Monde*, reported in *Al-Ahram* the same day, Fawzi Al-Qawuqji said: "Major military operations have not started yet, but when the war breaks out, we will stun the Jews and the whole world. The war may last for a month; it could last for a century. But we will surely win."

At the beginning of March, there was still no news of the Arab Liberation Army, or its leader, Fawzi Al-Qawuqji, entering Palestine. *Al-Ahram* of 3 March reported "the Arab Liberation Army is anxious to fight"; the attack, however, was postponed "until discussions in the Security Council are concluded."

Below the headline, *Al-Ahram*'s special correspondent from "somewhere in Palestine" reported that "crossing into Palestine from Syria or Lebanon has become easy now". He himself had crossed the border by car and met Al-Qawuqji's men at a post 30 miles inside Palestine. His guide during that journey was a 19-year-old Saudi, who had told him that the soldiers longed for the battle to begin, for all they had done thus far was "child's play". The young guerrilla mused: "War today is not the war our fathers and grandfathers fought. Politics are part of war now."

Quotations from British Foreign Office documents were translated from the Arabic study on Al-Qawuqji, by Jean Daiah, published in the London-Based Al-Hayat *newspaper, 8-9 February 1998.*

We welcome letters and contributions on all subjects raised on this page. Material may be edited for length and clarity; it should be addressed to M. Anis, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St., Cairo; Fax: +202 578 6089; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Doing business with Iraq and Iran

Despite current political problems, Iran and Iraq are two serious possibilities for economic cooperation with Egypt. **Dina Ezzat** and **Niveen Wahish** *explore the prospects*

A delegation from the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI) is currently visiting Tehran at the invitation of the Iranian Chamber of Industry, Commerce and Mining (CICM).

The visit is intended to reactivate economic and trade relations between the two countries whose diplomatic ties were cut after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 but which have recently been warming up to each other.

"The FEI visit is the first [by an Egyptian business delegation] in almost 20 years. It follows the recent moves by the governments of both countries to improve political relations," said Abdel-Moneim Soudi, chairman of the FEI. The invitation was extended following the Egyptian participation in the eighth summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), that was held last December in Tehran, with a large official delegation headed by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

Iran's CICM announced the visit early last month and said the two countries would discuss cooperation in heavy industry, the automobile industry, pharmaceuticals and textiles.

The president of the CICM, Ali Naghi-Kamushi, praised the visit and said "considering the desire of our leaders to end misunderstandings between the two countries, the presence of this Egyptian delegation opens a new chapter in relations."

The business trip will also help acquaint Egyptian businessmen with the Iranian market. Among the issues which will be considered by the delegation is the mechanism through which Egyptian industry could gain a stable foothold in the Iranian market. "This [mechanism] could include organising an exhibition of Egyptian goods in Tehran sometime later this year," said influential businessman Mamdouh Thabet Mekki, deputy chairman of the FEI.

Naghi-Kamushi called for the lifting of restrictions on commercial exchanges between the two countries and affirmed that Iran is "ready to establish air and sea connections with Egypt."

"It is indeed interesting to see that members of the private sector on both sides are taking serious initiatives to re-establish strong economic bonds between the two countries, as this would ultimately enhance bilateral rapprochement and thus serve the purpose of improving political ties," commented one Egyptian official. He added, "There are already some businessmen who have started to find their way around the Iranian bazaar and I think that their work has been given the green light by the government."

Egypt and Iran had fairly promising economic ties in the mid-1970s with several joint banks operating in Cairo and a large textile factory in Suez. There were also projects for bilateral trade agreements and joint ventures to build sugar refineries. Iran has also been transferring its oil through the pipes of the SUMED oil line — an operation that proceeded uninterrupted even during the hardest times of political friction between Cairo and Tehran in the 1980s and early 1990s.

In any event, bilateral trade — mainly due to the efforts of the private sector — was reactivated last year. Egyptian imports from Iran in 1997 are estimated at about $10 million. However, according to sources in the Commercial Representation Office, there are no official statistics for the size of Egyptian exports to Iran.

On the other hand, statistics do show that Iran has a 56 per cent share in six joint projects with Egypt valued at a total of LE216 million. Among these is the Misr Iran Bank.

Things are progressing, sources suggest. Egyptian and Iranian businessmen signed a deal last year under which $10 million worth of agriculture tractors were exported to Egypt.

Moreover, Egypt is building two sugar refineries for Iran as a way of paying off a $400 million debt to that country.

For the business community this is but a foretaste of what could be a very rewarding economic relationship.

"Iran is a major country in the Middle East; it is also a major economic power in the region and it is not in Egypt's interest to ignore any economic power in the region," businessman Mekki asserted. He added, "Within the framework of attempts to strengthen regional relations and to boost economic cooperation, we cannot overlook the role of Iran."

Indeed, one inter-regional framework in which Egyptian-Iranian economic relations could be enhanced is that of the D-8 (the group of eight developing countries) that has been functioning since 1996. Other than Egypt and Iran, members of the D-8 are Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria.

In the context of D-8, Egypt and Iran will be involved in a number of projects that will include the other six member states. Egypt, in its capacity as the trade coordinator of the group, is currently working on the feasibility studies for trade corporation that will aim at encouraging trade among the D-8 member states as well as between the group and other countries.

"Iran has very promising potential for economic cooperation; the political differences between Cairo and Tehran are bound to be worked out sooner or later, so we shouldn't waste any time because there are other countries which would like to jump on the opportunities that are there," said one diplomat.

And, according to his assessment, what goes for Iran should also go for Iraq — of course while taking into consideration the current political dilemma of Baghdad and the economic sanctions imposed on it for the last seven years.

The FEI had scheduled a visit to Iraq, but due to the political turmoil of the last few weeks the visit was deferred. That visit was supposed to be an attempt to secure Egyptian producers a decent portion of the deals to export food, medicine, and other basic humanitarian stuff to the Iraqi government within the framework of the oil-for-food agreement, the volume of which was recently increased from $2.4 billion to $5.2 billion every six months.

It was within the framework of oil-for-food that Egypt last May signed three contracts worth $12.2 million with Iraq to allow Cairo to export food and detergents.

Following this deal, Egypt has twice sent representatives of several pharmaceutical and food-processing companies to display their products in the Iraqi capital.

Egyptian businessmen say that they are keen to do business with the Iraqis. According to Mekki, "We follow the same approach [that we adopt with Iran] towards Iraq."

Officials admit that Iraq is an outstanding economic possibility for the Egyptian business sector. They argue that, since Iraq was spared a threatened military strike over the UN inspection of its arms facilities, Egypt should forge ahead with attempts to enhance economic cooperation.

"Today we hear some sources suggesting that within a year or two the economic sanctions on Iraq might be eased, so it means that Iraq will be working on a wide reconstruction process of its infrastructure to which Egypt should significantly contribute," said one official.

Moreover, sources say, Cairo's political problems with Baghdad, that started with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, are easier to sort out than its problems with Iran, where Egypt has some security concerns.

"With Iran the government worries about the attempts of the Iranians to export their Islamic Revolution but this is not the case with Iraq," said one official.

One Iraqi source said, "The Western countries are already eyeing certain projects particularly in relation to the oil industry; this is primarily why the Russians, French and Chinese fought so hard to prevent the US from going ahead with its plan to launch a military operation against Baghdad" last month.

Manpower is surely one thing that Egypt could always export to Iraq. Before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Egypt used to have an estimated three million blue and white collar workers in Iraq. "It will be an economic score if we simply send these people back," suggested one official.

Sending three million people for jobs out of Egypt would not only mean reducing the national unemployment rate, but also some extra foreign currency that will be coming to the state coffers from the remittances of these expatriates.

Moreover, as members of the Arab League, Egypt and Iraq should be implementing the 10 per cent reduction on customs dues among the Arab states that went into effect at the beginning of this year in an effort to eventually establish an Arab free trade area. Egypt is one of seven states which already started implementation. Iraq is among five states which promised implementation soon.

As one official argued, the Arab Muslim countries of the Middle East face a particular common threat "just because they happen to be in a region rich in oil reserves that the West likes to control." Therefore, he concluded, "A political-economic strategy should be worked out to secure Egypt's close cooperation with these two major regional economic powers: Iran and Iraq."

G-15 to meet in Cairo

THE CHAIRMEN of the trade and industrial unions of the G-15 member states will meet in Cairo 11-13 March to draw up a final report on the legal rules for cooperation among the member states of the economic group.

A grouping of developing countries from Latin America, Africa and Asia, the G-15 member states are Egypt, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Yugoslavia, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Nigeria, Argentina, Jamaica, Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil and Peru.

The group was founded in 1989 as an offshoot of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The final report, which will be drawn up in Cairo next week, is expected to set, once and for all, the methods required to enhance and protect investments and to avert double taxation among the G-15 member states.

The report will be submitted to the meeting of the G-15 trade ministers due to convene in Cairo in May to prepare for the group's foreign ministers meeting also scheduled to take place in Cairo in the same month.

Moreover, in May the eighth G-15 summit, to be attended by heads of state and government, will convene in Cairo to review world economic developments. The summit will also review a report, submitted by the G-15 finance ministers, on the Asian financial crisis.

Also to be considered by the summit is a number of developmental and technical projects to which non-G-15 members can contribute.

These include the operation of a geological centre in Brazil, a centre for the renewed sources of energy in Egypt and a centre for developing and transferring technology in Senegal.

The summit is expected to issue a communiqué that will spell out the stances of the G-15 on the main economic, and some political, issues.

The exact date for the summit has yet to be fixed.

According to Dawlat Hassan, assistant to Egypt's minister of foreign affairs on economic matters, the main significance of this meeting is that it will allow the heads of state and government to take stock of the recent world economic developments and formulate a unified stand for the bloc.

The G-15 members represent the emerging economies of the Third World. They have 30 per cent of the world's population and 27 per cent of the Third World land area.

The total GDP of the G-15 constitutes 39 per cent of the Third World GDP, and its exports constitute 31 per cent of the total exports of the developing countries.

The first and latest G-15 summits were held in the Malaysian capital in 1990 and 1997.

This eighth summit was supposed to be hosted by Jamaica but it withdrew its candidacy, citing domestic reasons. Egypt offered to play host and Jamaica will host the following summit. And, as originally planned, Egypt will host the tenth summit in the year 2000.

Opening the door to housing loans

ECONOMY Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali hailed this week a draft law aimed at encouraging banks to extend housing loans to limited-income clients. Although the government did not sponsor the draft law, Ghali emphasised that it nonetheless fits in with the government's present policy of liberalisation and aims at channelling part of the vast cash liquidity currently unused in the banks into the housing sector, reports **Gamal Essam El-Din**.

The draft law, an amendment to the 1957 Banking and Credit Law 163, was submitted by Alexandrian business tycoon Talaat Mustafa. According to Mustafa, in 1995 the government submitted a similar draft law extending housing loans to limited-income citizens — but the law used the housing itself as collateral and thus gave banks the right to repossess a mortgaged house in case of buyer default. This law was rejected.

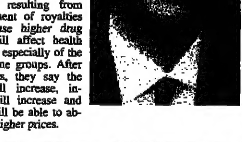
The defect in the draft law, Mustafa said, was that it violated article 1052 of civil law, which bans any form of confiscation of mortgaged public or private housing units. To address this defect, Mustafa's draft law — an amendment of articles 52 and 53 of the Banking and Credit Law — will exempt banks from civil law article 1052. This, he said, will encourage banks to grant housing loans by giving them the right to repossess the housing units in case of buyer default.

"I would like to emphasise that there is a pressing need for this new law because it makes banks play a very vital role in solving the housing crisis. The government's current policy is encouraging the private sector to build new housing units in the desert in an attempt to reduce the severity of the housing crisis. This policy, however, could turn out to be a complete fiasco if the price of units in new housing communities was found to be beyond the financial capacity of a large number of citizens, especially the limited-income categories," Mustafa said.

Minister Ghali, however, indicated, in a hearing organised by the People's Assembly Economic Committee last Monday, that the bill still has to receive further careful study by the government. "Yes, it is true that Mustafa's law is free from any constitutional defects, but it has to be formulated in legal way by government experts," he said. As a result, the committee decided only to approve the bill in principle and hinge its final approval on the government's reformulation of it.

Building bridges: AmCham's 15th Doorknock Mission

Amidst unprecedented government attention, a delegation from the American Chamber of Commerce starts on its annual Doorknock Mission to the US on 7 March. **Aziza Sami** spoke with AmCham President Ahmed Shawki on the issues the mission will raise with US officials and business representatives



What is the objective of AmCham's visit to the US this year and how does it differ from previous ones?

This mission is very important. In previous missions, it was difficult for us to try to sell Egypt. People were sceptical about the progress made here to encourage investment. This year we are very confident that we have a success story to tell. The present government has issued and amended 57 new laws deregulating the economy and encouraging private sector investment. We also have a success story in the privatisation — not only of the public enterprises, but in the area of infrastructure, such as electricity, airports, and mobile phones.

We now have more confidence to attract the major investors for mega-projects, such as Toshka, north of the Gulf of Suez, Sharq El-Tafriaa (Suez Canal bypass), Sharq El-Ewainat, and the mining of iron south of Aswan.

Did Prime Minister El-Ganzouri give the AmCham delegation any guidelines as to what issues should be highlighted during the mission?

The guidelines were very direct: to work hard with the American investor, to try to interest the Americans in projects involving technology transfer, the development of human resources and expertise — especially in the field of desert land reclamation.

Despite the fact that AmCham has been going back to the US every year for 15 years, it seems that these missions have not resulted in a marked increase in direct investments.

Two years ago, we held a conference on the capital market in New York with the banking sector and the financial sector. And this has indirectly encouraged several US institutions to bring in about US$1 billion in investments to Egypt.

For 15 years we have been building bridges and confidence, and I think we are getting through.

American direct investments in Egypt are minimal save for the petroleum sector. Why, in your view, is this the case?

American investors, like any investors, have certain requirements in order to come to a country, such as transparency, incentives, the availability of infrastructure, telecommunications etc. That is why people are coming now. Investments are going to grow and American investors will come for the larger projects.

Will you be promoting any hi-tech projects?

The government itself is promoting the high-tech valley near Ismailia. This will be one of the issues we will be discussing.

Hi-tech in Egypt is based mainly on automation. I think we should also give attention to providing employment. One aspect of hi-tech is the software industry. I think we should encourage both Egyptians and American investors to invest in the software industry.

Representing the Egyptian side in AmCham, what is your position on the issue of American companies pushing for the rapid liberalisation of the pharmaceuticals industry? It is argued that this is to the detriment of the industry.

AmCham has members from the Egyptian and American pharmaceuticals companies and it is very interesting to see the debate. The American companies are trying to protect their research and development and to protect the new products which they would like to introduce to Egypt but are worried that these new products will not be covered by (patent) protection.

On the other hand, the Egyptian companies argue that the GATT gives them a five-year transition period, which we should take until the market can implement the protection and absorb expected price increases resulting from the payment of royalties — because higher drug prices will affect health standards especially of the low-income groups. After five years, they say the GDP will increase, incomes will increase and people will be able to absorb the higher prices.

What is your position as a representative of AmCham, who will be going to the US and will be approached by the US pharmaceuticals companies?

The US side is trying to push for earlier liberalisation. By not liberalising earlier, the Egyptians will not be able to benefit from the latest technology and developments in the industry.

I personally think that we should come to a formula and a gradual protection scheme for patents that would also ensure that the price of drugs will not be increased at the cost of health.

Both sides have a point, but they should come to a mutually beneficial agreement — and this is the position we will take to the US.

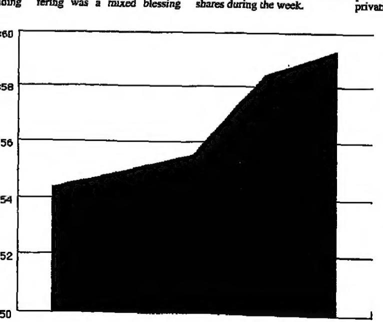
Market report

Mobile in high demand

ALTHOUGH the General Market Index saw a 3.61-point increase through the week ending 26 February, a sliding trend featured prominently.

The star of the week was the Egyptian Mobile Phone Company. The offering was more than 60 times oversubscribed. Analysts attributed the high demand to a number of reasons: the low price of the offering, LE10 per share, coupled with the comparatively small amount of shares investors must subscribe to. Investors are allowed to subscribe to a minimum of 50 shares. The fact that the company will monopolise the growing mobile phone market until another competitor can step into the market was another factor. A government committee is currently studying bids submitted by two international telecommunication consortiums for a licence to operate a mobile phone network. Experts believe that getting such a licence and starting operations will take the winning consortium about one year.

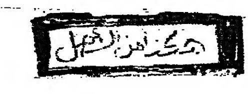
However, some market experts believe that the EMPC offering was a mixed blessing since it partially led to an overall plunge in the value of shares traded in the week. Attracted by low-price shares, many investors rushed to divest their shareholdings in other companies. The increase in share supply resulted in a decline in the price of 50 traded shares during the week.



On the other hand, the week witnessed a number of events that relieved the market. The Iraq-UN deal was one. The Cabinet Privatisation Committee also announced that 34 public sector companies will be privatised by the end of this year. While a batch will be divested through the stock market, there are others, including Kaha for food industries and Egypt's most famous department store Hannaux, that will be offered to an anchor investor.

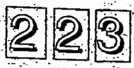
Medinat Nasr for Housing and Development registered the highest volume of transactions as LE18 million worth of its shares changed hands. This was marginally reflected in the LE3.46 increase in its share value. Olympic Group for Financial Investments cornered the biggest slice of the market; its transactions accounted for 7.35 per cent of overall market transactions. The Suez Canal Insurance Company registered the highest increase in share value, 21.45 per cent, to close at LE17.89.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**





Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life



Modern Egypt saw its first labour strike on the eve of the 20th century. It was staged by, of all people, cigarette rollers who were mostly foreigners. It was followed in 1901 by a tailors' strike. But these were minor affairs compared to a major strike by more than 2,000 tramway workers in 1911. The strike lasted eight days and greatly disrupted life in the capital. It also triggered violent clashes between police and the strikers who had wide popular support. In this instalment of his *Diwan* series, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story from reports published by *Al-Ahram*





Over 2,000 tram workers participated in the 1911 strike that paralysed the capital and elicited widespread popular support. The strike appeared to prove the effectiveness of collective action aimed at achieving higher wages or better working conditions, and triggered a string of "copycat" initiatives throughout the country

The tram workers' strike of 1911 — occurring only 15 years after the first electric tramway line came into operation in Egypt — was the largest work stoppage up to that point in the history of the Egyptian labour movement. Moreover, its effects were more far-reaching than its major predecessors, the cigarette rollers' strike of 1899 and the tailors' strike of 1901. Cigarette smoking then was largely a European habit, adopted by only a handful of Egyptians, and the workers in this industry were largely drawn from the foreign communities, notably the Greek and Armenian. Similarly, although many of the workers in the clothing industry were Egyptians, their products too were geared to the foreign communities in Egypt and a minority of Egyptians who emulated Western fashions. The tram workers' strike was a different matter altogether.

In its 15 years of operation, the electric tram brought the diverse ends of Cairo into closer proximity, revolutionising urban life in the capital. From its modest beginning in 1896 with a core of two lines, one from Boulaq to Abul-Ela, and a second from Ataba to Bab El-Khalq, the tramway network rapidly expanded. The following year the National Tramway Company obtained a concession to open a third line, from Giza to the Pyramids. In 1902, a fourth line opened, extending from the central train station to Rod El-Farag in Shubra, and, in 1908, the line from Ataba was linked to that in Giza.

So much a part of life had the tramway become that it entered popular song, as the following ditty (liberally translated) illustrates:

Oh Abbasiyya tramway,
Take me to Qasr El-Nil.
Let me see my love today
and that sweet, rosy cheek.
Oh Abbasiyya tramway,
Keep running down the line.
I'll gladly give my eyes away,
once you take me to my beloved.

It is no wonder, in light of the above, that the tram workers' strike would bring life in the capital to a standstill for several days. It would also precipitate very harsh reactions in the nation's newspapers, notably in *Al-Ahram* which was outspoken in its defence of the strikers.

The 1911 strike was not the first by tram workers. Three years previously, in October 1908, the National Tramway Company saw another strike. However, it was much more limited in scope — a sort of trial run for the massive 1911 strike.

Limited to the tramway depot workers in Abbasiyya, Shubra and Giza, the strikers in 1908 sat on the tramlines in order to prevent trains from leaving the depots. Their demands covered a range of issues from reduction in working hours to pay increases, additional annual and sick leave, and exemption from paying the costs of uniforms and accessories. The rapid intervention of the police, who assaulted strikers with batons and whips, brought that strike to a speedy and conclusive end.

The National Tramway Company, however, was quick to learn a lesson from that strike. In one of its general assembly meetings, "chaired by Idris Bek Raghib and attended by several notables and nearly 200 workers," as *Al-Ahram* reports, a syndicate committee was elected comprising a number of notables and senior officials of the company. The composition of this committee was certainly not representative of the workers, suggesting that the initiative took place at the promoting of the company board of directors in order to keep the workers under control. As events of 1911 demonstrate, the scheme did not succeed.

Tramway operations continued to expand, meanwhile. On 7 July 1911, *Al-Ahram* reports that the Tramway Company was rapidly implementing plans to extend the Boulaq-Citadel line to Imam El-Shafie. A second item that day announced that the company was in the process of relocating its headquarters to a 35,000-square-metre plot of land in Abbasiyya, after which it would convert the former headquarters in Boulaq to an electricity generating plant.

That same month, we learn that trouble was brewing. On 25 July, the newspaper reported that the company was engaged in negotiations with its employees over a series of demands. The company approved most of the demands, which had been categorised according to the functions of the various employees.

It granted a reduction of half an hour in the working day of tram and station inspectors, who would now work alternate daily shifts of 10 and 11 days. The inspectors would also receive a salary increase of a piastre per day and an additional two days holiday per month. Tram operators were also granted an an additional two days paid holiday per month and a salary increase of half a piastre per day. Mechanics and electricians would work nine hour shifts and would be accorded a five per cent raise, "on the condition that they had not already attained the maximum limits of their salary bracket and that the raise is no less than five millimes per day." The same applied to both the depot workers and switch operators.

Despite this, negotiations broke down over a single issue: severance pay. The employees insisted that severance pay should be equivalent to one month's salary for every year of service. The company negotiators attempted to reassure the workers that "it would never dismiss an employee as long as he performs his duties faithfully." The workers' leaders were unconvinced.

When it appeared that a strike was in the offing, the minister of interior held a meeting with the workers' lawyers, G. Mifsud and Ahmed Lutfi. Mifsud advised his clients to hold their ground on three points: a reduction of working hours to nine per day, entitlement to full salaries for absence due to illness or other compelling reasons, and severance pay equal to one month for each year of service. The representative of the company refused to yield, negotiations reached a deadlock and the strike was declared for 30 July.

Al-Ahram describes events that day: "Tramway workers in Cairo refused to report to work. They have gathered in front of the tramway depots and workshops in Shubra, Abbasiyya, Boulaq and Giza. The tramway lines are silent. Last night, tram workers met with their representatives and lawyers and decided to declare a strike in response to the Tramway Company's refusal to meet their demands concerning severance pay. The company representatives hold that their decision is correct and will adhere to it pending consultations with the board of directors in Brussels."

The report of one of *Al-Ahram*'s correspondents on the scene adds, "As soon as tramway workers returned the trams to the depots last night they declared a strike. Police arrived immediately and, rifles in hand, posted themselves around the depots. When the workers arrived in the morning they set up tents and chairs and took part with the police in guarding the depots. The strikers are determined to remain peaceful as long as the company does not act to operate the tramways in spite of them."

The first reaction of the company was to issue to the workers an ultimatum giving them 24 hours to report back to work. The ultimatum continued: "Whoever heeds this advice should record his name in his designated depot or administrative office, while those who do not shall be considered dismissed from service."

Only seven heeded the ultimatum; some 2,000 workers remained on strike. Bolstered by this indication of solidarity, the strikers increased their demands. They called for a cooperative fund, the proceeds of which would go to the ill and needy. The fund would be created jointly by the company, monthly deductions from the workers' salaries, any penalties deducted from the workers' salaries and the interest payments on the insurance deposits which the workers are required to pay when they are hired.

On 1 August, *Al-Ahram*, quick to side with the workers, launched a vehement attack on the company. The company consistently reneged on its commitments, it wrote. "It pledged to the public that fares would not exceed four milliemes but fares have risen to five. Why? It pledged to add new, clean first class passenger carriages. Where are they? It pledged to repair the roads to a width of three metres on either side of the tracks. We have seen no sign of street repairs. It pledged to make women's sections on the carriages, and what did it do? It installed partitions that imprison women within a space too confined and restricted to accommodate more than only a very small number."

The article urged the government to act as European governments would under such circumstances, which would be to oblige the company to pay half of its profits as rent for the streets it uses. "If we were to calculate the cost per square metre of the land owned by the company, it would amount to an enormous sum. This sum the company currently invests on its own, with no benefit to the nation. Will the government and legislature wake up to this fact and demand the rights of the people as the tramway workers are demanding their rights at this moment?"

Neither the growing momentum of the strike nor the criticism of the company in the press would compel it to back down. On the contrary, it escalated the situation by bringing in former workers to operate the trams and securing government guarantees of protection. Once the strikers got wind of this decision, they rushed to the depots to prevent the trains from moving out. The workers' lawyer, Mifsud, announced that the company officials were trying to intimidate the strikers, and he sent a telegram to the prime minister urging him not to allow the government to collaborate with these tactics.

Unfortunately, Mifsud's appeal was to no avail. On 2 August, "Egypt's soil was stained with the blood of the striking workers," as *Al-Ahram* blazoned on its front page that day. The newspaper reported that the company director had asked the governor of Cairo to offer protection for 50 scab workers. The governor complied, dispatching a cavalry squadron and several trucks filled with infantry police, half of whom were armed with rifles and the other half with truncheons. When one striker fell to the ground wounded, the others fled. However, the police continued to chase them, flaying and beating the strikers without mercy. Then they moved the trains out of the depots. Two armed policemen were stationed in each carriage, and the trains proceeded closely one after the other in order to maintain tight security." The scene was repeated in the Abbasiyya depot.

The company's action provoked massive popular support for the strikers. *Al-Ahram* reports that "thousands of people attacked and destroyed a tramway carriage in front of the central train station, another on Abdel-Aziz Street and a third in the vicinity of Abul-Ela." Clashes with the police resulted in numerous wounded. Those with minor injuries managed to escape; however, 25 had to be taken to hospital. The following day, 3 August, a throng of protesters gathered in Ataba Square. When the police moved to disperse the crowds with water hoses, the newspaper writes, "not a single coffee house or passerby was spared and the coffee house owners protested vehemently against this maltreatment."

Even in the aftermath of the violence the strike continued. It was taking its toll on the company. On 4 August, the company's income was no more than LE40, compared to an average of LE1,200 per day before the strike. The director quickly dispelled rumours that the company would refuse to rehire striking workers. In a statement intended to placate both the workers and the public, the company announced that it would grant all the workers' demands, with the exception of the demand regarding severance pay, and that all workers would be restored to their former positions in the company and receive the appropriate pay raises and other benefits that had been agreed upon.

The announcement marked the turning point in the crisis. *Al-Ahram* reported, "It was well received by the workers and immediately afterwards they reopened the tram line between Boulaq and the Citadel. The police commissioner has ordered guards stationed on all the trains. We expect the strike to end on 7 August."

Al-Ahram's prediction was accurate. On that day, the tramway workers called off their strike after having suffered minimal losses in their ranks. The company, too, lived up to its pledges. It hired back all the workers with the exception of 27 who were charged with "incitement to strike".

In spite of the amicable conclusion, the storm had not subsided. Also on 7 August 1911, *Al-Ahram's* headline announced, "The strike spreads to Alexandria." The newspaper's correspondent in that city reports: "Just before the tram workers in Cairo called an end to their strike, their colleagues in Alexandria moved to emulate them and presented their demands to the Alexandria Tramway Company." Their demands were similar to the demands of the workers in Cairo and the scenario of the strike was virtually the same though with minor modifications due the demographic character of Egypt's northern port city. On the one hand, a greater proportion of strikers were Europeans, among whom the influence of "anarchists and socialists" were more prominently felt. The newspaper reports that these radical groups "distributed leaflets among the workers inciting them to strike and they protested against the maltreatment by the police of their brethren in Cairo." On the other hand, the same demographic feature permitted a greater degree of understanding between the two sides: both the company management and the strikers were of predominantly European origin. Perhaps for this reason *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent reported that most of the tramways in Alexandria continued to operate and that "the public barely feels the strike and is reassured to find that a police guard has been stationed in each carriage to prevent assault against the trams." Perhaps for the same reason the correspondent observed that many of the strikers had returned to work and that the strike in Alexandria lacked the momentum that gave its counterpart in Cairo a stronger bargaining position with the company, and it soon fizzled out.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Indian tourism delegation to Egypt

EGYPTAIR, in cooperation with Mena House Hotel, Oberoi Hotel and Karnak Tours, have extended invitations to 15 top tourism and media professionals in India to take a week-long tour of Egypt's touristic sites in Cairo, Luxor and Aswan.

Mr Hamza Khattab, regional manager of EgyptAir in India, explained that accompanying the Indian delegation on its visit will be the sales manager for EgyptAir in India.

Khattab explained that the trip will be aimed at boosting the number of Indian tourists to Egypt, which will consequently lead to an increase in the number of flights per week from India to Egypt.





Money & Business

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ACITEX 98 achieves goals thanks to sponsors and exhibiting companies

THE SUCCESS of the Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition, held last 18-21 February 1998 at the Cairo International Conference Centre is still being heralded as a success by members of the business community, a success which came as the result of the presence of representatives of international companies displaying the most up-to-date developments in the field of computers and information technology.

Likewise, the fair has made an impact on the international level, especially since pavilions representing SYSTEMS in Munich and CeBIT in Hannover, Germany, were present. That thousands of people attended the exhibition attests to the fact that the Egyptian public has a strong interest in data technology and are keen to learn about the latest happenings in the field.

The seminars and sessions organised by exhibiting and sponsoring companies in the exhibition proved to be both informative and enlightening. Company seminars put forth new ideas which showed that Egyptian capabilities occupy an outstanding position in comparison with the rest of the world.

On the marketing level, ACITEX proved to be a great success as all marketing goals were met, thanks to extensive media coverage of the exhibition and its conferences.

Indeed ,the success of the 6th ACITEX was such that a flood of reservations have been made in advance for the 7th ACITEX, to be held again at the Cairo International Conference Centre, with promises of an even larger exhibition space and an even greater success.



Dr. Ahmed Abada Sarhan, chairman of the International Artificial Intelligence Exhibition, receiving a commemorative medal from Ali Ghoneim, deputy chairman of Al-Ahram and head of the AMAC Centre, in appreciation his efforts in the field, during the closing session of the conference.

Malta Trade Delegation in Egypt

THE MALTA Trade Delegation held a series of meetings in Cairo and Alexandria designed to expand commercial relations between Egypt and Malta.

The Trade Delegation was organised by METCO (Malta's national trade promotion organisation) with the main support of the Egyptian Businessmen's Association, the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce, the Chamber of Commerce of Alexandria, various business institutions in Egypt, and the Bank of Valletta (Malta's leading bank).

The chargé d'affaires at the Maltese Embassy in Cairo said that the Trade Delegation represented companies from different sectors who wished to discuss the possibility of cooperating with Egyptian investors and members of businessmen's associations and the Chamber of Commerce in Alexandria in an effort to boost relations between Malta and Egypt.

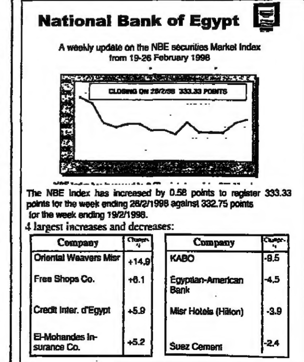
The delegation's first round of meetings with businessmen took place in Alexandria on 2 March while their second was to Cairo from 3-4 March at the El-Gezeirah Sheraton. These visits are considered important to the growing Egyptian marketplace, and the trade representative and the Maltese Embassy said that the aim was to widen the circle of the Maltese product market. The number of companies in the delegation reflected the wide range of products and services available from Malta. Industry in particular has developed quite rapidly in Malta, and has the opportunity to increase commercial and investment cooperation between it and the Arab world in general, which has opened the doors of trade opportunity to Malta and the Arab world in general, and Egypt in particular.

Data Bank Computer to build training centre

ENG. SALEH Hegazi, representing Data Bank Computer Co, explained why his company's pavilion was flooded with visitors during the 6th ACITEX exhibition, which was held recently at the Cairo International Conference Centre. "Data Bank Computer is currently constructing the largest international educational project for data technology in the country," he said, "with investments of LE8 million being made on the first stage alone."

The Centre, which will provide educational opportunities for individuals wishing to enter the workforce having the necessary technologically-based skills that are needed by companies, will be constructed on an area of 3,785 square metres in the Tagammu Al-Khamis area of New Cairo.

The Centre will use state-of-the-art equipment and methods to train its students, with classes expected to begin next year.



National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE securities Market Index from 19-26 February 1998

The NBE Index has increased by 0.58 points to register 333.33 points for the week ending 28/2/1998 against 332.75 points for the week ending 19/2/1998.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %	Company	Change %
Oriental Weavers Misr	+14.9	KABO	-9.5
Free Shops Co.	+6.1	Egyptian-American Bank	-4.5
Credit Inter. d'Egypt	+5.9	Misr Hotels (Hilton)	-3.9
El-Mohandes Insurance Co.	+5.2	Suez Cement	-2.4

Al-Ahram Weekly

Hasty pudding

Now that the UN Security Council has acted, the big test is on. Will Iraq comply with the resolution? What will the US do if Baghdad reneges on any of the provisions of its agreement with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan — a deal that has now been consecrated by the Council resolution? If Washington determines, rightly or wrongly, that Iraq is guilty of a breach, the question is: *will the United States act immediately and launch a* military strike against Iraq, or will it take its grievances to the Security Council and seek its approval of military action?

These are some of the questions raised by the adoption, Monday night, of the resolution which warns Iraq of the "severest consequences" if it breaches the agreement that stipulates the unconditional and unfettered search for weapons of mass destruction by UNSCOM members and a group of diplomats selected *by the secretary-general*.

According to US officials, the administration feels it has the green light from the UN to use force if necessary. But Russia, France and China have expressed their conviction that this is not the case. They maintain that Washington will have to seek Security Council clearance first. One provision of the resolution stipulates that the Council will remain "actively seized" of the implementation of the inspection agreement, and this is seen as an implicit requirement that the United States consult with the Council before resorting to force.

But the resolution holds one promise for Iraq: that the sanctions imposed seven years ago, after the invasion of Kuwait, will be lifted if Baghdad implements the inspection agreement fully.

This promise is something of a silver lining. Another is the *sympathy the world community has demonstrated with the Iraqi* people, and the recognition that the sanctions must be lifted.

The UN-Iraq deal was a major achievement for the world organisation, enhancing its position as a welcome arbiter in explosive situations — a fact Washington has difficulty accepting. Annan could have brandished the stick: the US armada was ready and waiting in the Gulf. But the secretary-general tried diplomacy. It worked.

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941, Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B 1X9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt. Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694806.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solomos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Banti, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg. Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

The costs of freedom

A free press must exercise its responsibilities judiciously, particularly in developing countries, writes Ibrahim Nafie



Throughout my career I have always had two goals in sight. The first has been to work towards a truly free press in Egypt, immune not only to the power of the state but to the forces of ignorance. The second was for the press to become an integral part of the dynamics of our society, keenly attuned to its problems and concerns, capable of providing the impetus that would help steer the country past the obstacles lying in the path of development.

Certainly, the first of these goals is cherished by journalists around the world. The second, however, is complicated by the circumstances of developing countries which compound the responsibilities of the journalist. Unlike the countries of the developed world, which evolved naturally over centuries, progress in Third World countries demands strenuous leaps within over short periods of time. What may be a luxury for one society is for us a matter of necessity. And it is the journalist's task to discern such realities and accommodate them.

In Egypt, the responsibilities of the journalist are even heavier, due to the in*fluence of the Egyptian press beyond our* borders. These responsibilities, moreover, are compounded by the enormous changes that have swept the world order, placing ever higher demands on our country to compete in international and regional markets, to foster technological development and to mobilise all resources.

Responsible behaviour on the part of the press is a fundamental condition for the full realisation of the liberties we advocate. Freedom of expression and opinion cannot be separated from the degree of progress of a society as a whole. In a politically, economically and culturally dynamic society, the scope of freedom expands in proportion to the rise of new social strata whose interests are voiced in the press. Conversely, in an inert, torpid society, the press is, at best, no more than an embellishment expressing the narrow interests of a cultural elite; at worst, it can lend itself to totalitarian trends inimical to the freedom of expression.

The relationship between the press and investment in any society is of central importance. The case of Egypt illustrates this relationship succinctly. Egypt, in order to rise to the domestic and external challenges it faces must engineer a seven per cent growth in annual GDP which requires a major increase in investment.

My great fear is that some members of the Egyptian press have come to view press freedom solely from the perspective of the developed world and bring this perspective to bear on issues in a manner intended to scandalise public opinion. In so doing, they ignore the organic role of the press in furthering society's interests and rupture the vital relationship between the press and investment at a delicate phase in national development. Without mentioning specific names it has become apparent that a handful of our national newspapers are bent on sensationalism which erodes confidence in our national economy. These newspapers have unwittingly aligned themselves with the *forces that produce terrorism at home* and which, abroad, seek to curb Egypt's growth.

Frequently we read articles despairing of Egypt's future, mourning the glorious past and painting everything *in the present* as corrupt. Evidently, the enormous social and economic strides our country has made recently do not figure in their analysis. Or, if they do, these newspapers adopt another course, which is to claim that our economic and social reform programmes simply cater to foreign interests. Not only do they cast aspersions against the patriotism of our architects of reform, but they have overlooked these officials' unyielding insistence before international agencies that Egypt will brook no interference in the path it has chosen for reform.

A third theme harped upon by some newspapers is to insinuate that the reform programme ultimately is intended to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Nothing could be more blatantly off the mark. The poor are the first to benefit from the lower rates of inflation and increased employment made possible by growth.

As though sowing the seeds of despair and hurling accusations of dependency and injustice were not enough, these newspapers also tend to cast aspersions on Egyptian businessmen. They are variously *depicted as a corrupt and parasitic class*, local surrogates for foreign companies, or interested solely in the rapid accumulation of money. Yet in most cases, when such allegations have ended up before the courts, they have been proven groundless. Clearly, the only motive behind such slanders is to attract readers and increase circulation.

The growing private sector represents a boon to the economy, not only in terms of increased production, but also in employment. Unfortunately, the persistent note of gloom in some newspapers renders the Egyptian investor reluctant to contribute more and, seeing *the image of* the Egyptian investor tarnished in his own country, the foreign investor takes fright. As investment declines, aspirations for the future dissipate and Egypt's youth *finds no other* outlet but to pine for the past, becoming easy prey to the forces of extremism, or else he seeks to emigrate.

What is ironic is that *this tenor of reportage* occurs in the name of the noble principle of freedom of expression. However, this is not the freedom of the press that journalists who are truly committed to the betterment of their country advocate, for the blackmail, intellectual terrorism and moral bullying that we see in some newspapers could not be more inimical to the freedoms they supposedly espouse.

Let me be clear. I am not suggesting that the press should cover-up or condone corruption, nor do I suggest that press freedom should be restricted in any way. Rather, what I urge is that the mission of journalists compels us to be on guard against that minority among us who seek to distract us from the aspirations of our society. There is a vast difference between criticism and slander, objectivity and sensationalism, constructive commit*ment to the profession* and destructive mud-slinging, between those who are dedicated to the priorities of our country and those who *import their priorities from* societies whose circumstances are entirely different.

The World Bank and state sovereignty

Back from a seminar organised by the World Bank in Hurghada, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed *recaps some of the main points raised during the debate*

Top officials of the World Bank organised a seminar with prominent Egyptian journalists in Hurghada last Thursday and Friday, in the *aim of familiarising public opinion with the* policies of the Bank, and in the hope of dispelling misconceptions concerning its activities in Egypt and elsewhere in the developing world.

In the recent past, the Bank has more than once expressed its desire to set its record straight with the Egyptian body politic. Many in the political field, for their part, are aware that as no developing country today can do without the World Bank and the International *Monetary Fund, there is no point in* 'demonising' these international institutions which work in close cooperation with the United Nations, and that, whatever the misgivings, a candid dialogue is beneficial for all concerned. So the seminar took place in the presence of a variety of participants, including representatives of opposition forces in Egypt.

What made the need for such a dialogue particularly pressing is the Bank's failure to predict the breakdown suffered by a number of emerging Asian economies recently. The Asian 'tigers' as they had come to be called, were hailed by the World Bank as prototypes of the model other developing countries should emulate. Their collapse, and the Bank's total failure to predict it, has shaken the credibility of the international organisation.

The discussion in the seminar quickly moved to the essentials, beyond the purely technical problems of the Bank's approach to the rationale of economic development. The key issue was what legitimacy the Bank enjoys in coming forward with recipes to overcome crisis situations in developing countries. Especially when these recipes have often *been criticised as interfering with the sovereign* prerogatives of the state.

Sovereignty is a particularly sensitive issue in the developing world. At a time independence was being won from the colonial powers, safeguarding national sovereignty was regarded as pivotal for the whole enterprise. This was all the more true at a time the independence drive was supported by an *overwhelming majority of the country's population*. What Leonard Binder described as "a moment of enthusiasm" tended to downplay the importance of accountability as a critical issue in dealing with the newly independent state's leadership.

In the more recent period, the gradual erosion of state sovereignty has become a worldwide phenomenon, thanks primarily to giant strides in science and technology. How can a developing country claim to enjoy *meaningful sovereignty* when its territory is exposed to surveillance by the air and space/craft of external powers with the ability to capture and record the *minutest details* of what is happening on earth? Over and above the material means of violating state sovereignty, there is also the emergence of a supra-state structure based on economic, informational and media networks that states cannot immunise themselves against. In the electronic age, no state barriers can prevent the free motion of electrons used in electronic mail, electronic money, electronic computers or electronic audio-visual devices. *No longer is the sovereign state the* basic building block of the world system. More and more, this system is moving towards a globalist approach in which all states are seen as parts of an integrated whole.

An accusation now directed at the state in many developing countries is that it often based development on an over simplistic notion of planning, disregarding the complexity involved in catching up with more developed societies, and the difficulties that impeded all attempts at reducing the gap. Overcentralisation has been at the expense of in*dividual initiatives, with the public sector be*ing given responsibilities that could have been more effectively discharged by the private sector. *Lack of accountability permitted* such phenomena to proliferate.

But this does not mean that recipes presented by external agencies are necessarily better. For example, there is no guarantee that the solutions presented by the World *Bank are the product of accumulated* developmental experience acquired by world society as a whole rather than reflecting the approach of the developed countries at the summit of the global community. The viewpoints of the summit and that emanating from the world community as a whole cannot be considered identical, or even compatible, as long as the North/South divide remains as acute as it is.

Recipes presented by the World Bank are often criticised as requiring developing countries to adjust their economic policies in line with the mechanisms that respond to *the interests of external powers, without* regard to the normal role of the state which is to uphold national interests in face of influential external forces. This criticism appears justified when the World Bank calls upon a developing country to maintain high development rates, whatever the social cost, and whatever the sufferings the poorer sections of society will have to bear, on the grounds that this will help accelerate development and help them catch up with the *more developed* world.

Whatever the shortcomings of a centralised state, at least the lines of authority are clearly delineated. When market forces become the dominant driving force, a self-regulatory mechanism replaces a 'man-regulated' system. Decision-making is thus based on what is perceived as likely trends, rather than on established information. Information, even if faulty, allows a certain degree of predictability which is not the case when dealing with nothing more concrete than likely trends.

The Hurghada seminar was useful in help*ing to identify the problems still standing in* the way of more effective cooperation between the World Bank and socio-economic forces in *Egypt*. However, there is still a long way to go before solutions to these problems can be found.

So who won?

By Naguib Mahfouz

No sooner had the crisis with Iraq been defused than everybody was asking the same question: who won the round? Clinton or Saddam? The true victor, in fact, is the world community, thanks to the benefits it will reap in the future.

The secretary-general of the United Nations, the legal representative of the international community's will, as embodied in the resolution issued by the Security Council, has handled his task with consummate skill. Thus, both the UN and Iraq may be said to have won, insofar as they have succeeded in concluding an agreement.

By approving the agreement, the US has also scored a victory in a battle *against its own pride* — a battle which, as our own experience shows, is not easily won. The US was frighteningly vociferous about the military build-up in the Gulf, describing the air strikes it would launch as unprecedentedly intense and ferocious.

The victory is a blessing for humanity. Hopefully, the wisdom shown by both parties in the final moments of the crisis, which helped dispel the threat of war, will prevail, *ensuring* that never again will the world live in fear of war for weeks of anguish and suspense.

Claims that the Arabs are a fragmented and divided nation, which can never bridge its differences and reach an agreement, were also given the lie for once; the crisis in Iraq seems to have served as a rallying and cohesive force. The Arabs stood firm, unequivocally and uncompromisingly. In the face of danger, pan-Arabism comes very much alive in all Arab hearts. Indeed, this latest triumph was a victory for sentiments of Arab patriotism.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Time for reassessment

Al-Shaab: "Due to America's strategic interests in the region, the US military strike against Iraq will still take place even if it has been shelved for a few months. If the US has today backed down due to American public opinion and the position of Russia and the majority of Arab states, the pretexts for a future strike are not far away. The whole matter has merely been postponed."
(Gen. Saad El-Shazly, 27 February)

Al-Wafd: "Saddam Hussein will remain, creating tension and unrest in the Arab world until Iraq is torn apart and divided into tiny states which will fall under the influence of Israel. Saddam will continue to play games with the powers that be at the expense of his people who have, thus far, suffered greatly. It may be that Gaddafi was right when he said that Clinton and Saddam were part of a conspiracy of which the Iraqi people are the victim!"
(Gamal Badawy, 26 February)

October: "Netanyahu's government came to power to express blatantly what had hitherto been merely whispered: Israel's rejection of peace, threats to Arabs, defiance of the world community, through refusing to be a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, openly admitting the killing of Arab POWs, reneging on signed agreements, establishing strategic pacts with the US and Turkey, suspect moves in countries bordering the Arab world. With all this in mind, the time has *come* for a reassessment... It suffices to note the emergence of terror groups in the Arab countries and to ask, in whose interest do they act, and who benefits from the sabotage and mayhem they create?... Why can't we realise that what *happened to Iraq could happen to all Arab* countries after appropriate pretexts are concocted to justify aggression and intervention?"
(Ragab El-Banna, 1 March)

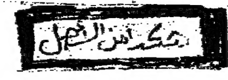
Akhbar El-Yom: "If the US administration seeks to salvage what remains of its credibility in the world — particularly the Arab world — it should withdraw its naval forces from the Gulf and send them to the Mediterranean to threaten Israel with a military strike if UN inspectors are not allowed to search for *weapons of mass* destruction on its soil."
(Anwar Wagdy, 28 February)

Al-Gomhuria: "It would be only logical to assume that after the relative calm that has descended following the Iraqi crisis, it is time to resume the peace process in the Middle East. But *we would be foolish to fall into* Netanyahu's trap of debating whether the Israelis should withdraw from eight per cent or 10 per cent of the West Bank. We should take the golden opportunity of the Iraqi crisis to further our cause. We lost the opportunity in 1991 when Bush decided to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict using the same principles of international legality which he applied to the Iraqi *invasion of Kuwait*. And Bush withheld loans to Israel worth billions of dollars but he was voted out of office and replaced by the unknown Clinton. But during the latest Iraqi crisis, Clinton did not apply the same principles to the Middle East peace process and he, too, is threatened with being booted out of office due to sex and financial scandals."
(Mohamed Abu Hadid, 26 February)

Compiled by **Galal Nassar**



Egypt's national football team has won the Africa Cup, and Coach El-Gohari stands proud and tall as a tree. He could stand there for years, basking in the glory of victory. The ball on his head is the world of responsibility the coach bears, but the powerful lines of his neck show he is more than up to the challenge. As his team bears him aloft on their shoulders and the air resounds with cries of "Gohari!... Gohari!", the coach's grin could light up a stadium.





Close up

Salama A. Salama

The price to pay

In a recent interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, the US ambassador to Egypt announced that a delegation of US pharmaceutical companies would seek to persuade Egypt to rapidly apply intellectual property and patent rights laws in the pharmaceutical sector before the grace period prescribed by the GATT Agreement expires. The ambassador contended that the measure would enhance this sector's competitiveness in global markets, and affirmed that he was working towards a similar goal in the insurance sector.

The week this interview was published, I participated in a seminar held by the World Bank in Egypt, titled "Egypt and the global economy". Discussions focused on the remarkable changes which have taken place in the global economy over the last few years. Globalism was recognised as a new and powerful force which strongly affects the course of development worldwide, and especially in the developing countries. Egypt and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa were said to have no choice but to rapidly move toward globalism and adapt to the mechanisms it necessitates. The seminar highlighted the fact that the issue today is not that of whether or not to go global, but of how to do so effectively, and how long the process should take.

The statistics of Egypt's growth rate, predicted challenges, the achievements of the economy in 1993-96 and the dramatic upswing in the Egyptian stock market, make it abundantly clear that Egypt is very likely to attain an annual growth rate of six per cent by the beginning of the coming century. New horizons of hope seem to be unfolding. New jobs would have to be created for a work force that is growing at a rate of one million new workers every year.

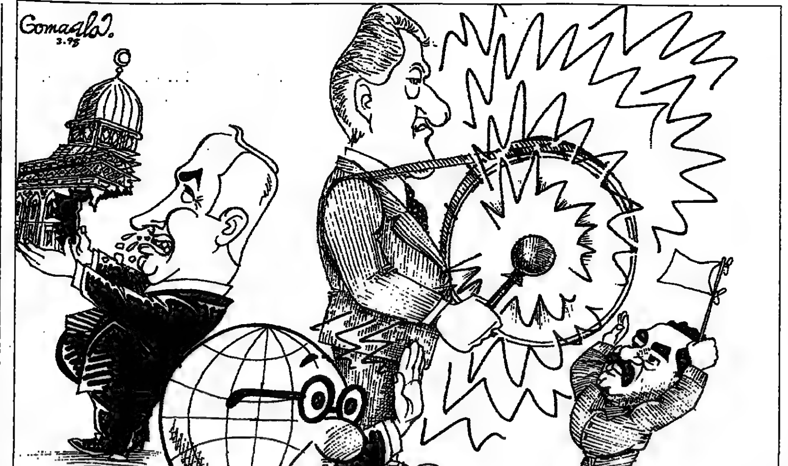
Even a perfunctory acquaintance with the role of multinational global corporations and their impact on the Third World, however, reveals that newly privatised Egyptian firms will face grave risks if they plunge prematurely into global markets. They must be adequately qualified in terms of technological and financial resources, if they are to establish internationally productive systems that can compete at the global level. Price increases may render their products unaffordable for Egyptian consumers. The indirect effects are destabilisation of the national economy and a rapid deterioration in the standard of living.

Many economists caution that most global corporations which invest in developing countries are insensitive to the social impact of their activities. Their interest in developing countries is totally focused on present or future market potential. This is why multinationals are eager to skip the transition period prescribed by the GATT.

Those who keep politics and the economy in mind may be alarmed at the possible political and social destabilisation caused by the shift from public to private sectors, and from local to global markets.

Among the most interesting topics raised at the seminar were the economic and financial fluctuations in the Southeast Asian markets and the immediate repercussions on social and political stability in Indonesia. Bringing things back to the status quo ante is bound to be difficult. The efforts of international institutions to halt a collapse have not yet been successful. The stakes are even higher in the Middle East, overcast by a stalled peace process, the constant threat of war precipitated by the crisis in Iraq, and the drop in oil prices.

Finally, the public should be informed of the meaning of globalism and its consequences. People should know the price they will pay for the benefits of globalisation, before they get on a one-way train headed in the wrong direction.



Soapbox

Tabloid terror

Journalism as we know it has its roots in the British tradition of lampoons, the defamatory leaflets used to blackmail or discredit enemies. Only recently did laws begin to regulate what kind of material could be published. Thus was journalism transformed: once a means of vilification, it became a highly respectable profession and an indispensable source of information. The most recent legislation on the right to privacy was prompted by the death of Princess Diana and Dodi El-Fayed. This legislation, of course, is a positive stop, which allows the press to perform its vital role, without encroaching on the privacy of others.

But the East is very different from the West, as we all know. Here, the press is left free to blunder, omit or confuse facts, disregard national policies and compromise diplomatic objectives. The outside world takes our tabloid journalism seriously, believing it to represent the opinion of the masses, as opposed to the state press, which speaks for the government. Such a dichotomy diminishes the credibility of all the state's institutions, including the national media, and this lack of credibility certainly does nothing to foster good relations with other countries, nor for that matter the achievement of our national objectives.

If foreign officials could come to realise that tabloid journalism reflects only its own narrow, particularist perspective, that it is irresponsible and quite possibly absurd, their attitudes would no doubt change.

Why does the state refrain from taking prompt action and enacting appropriate legislation? Democracy does not imply that people's right to privacy can be trampled, and the press must take note of this fact.



Mohamed Abdel-Moneim

This week's Soapbox speaker is the managing editor of Al-Ahram.

A strategy for the future

Whether or not they are the victims of overt military action, the Arabs are footing the bill. **Amin Hewedy** writes

Major powers determine their strategies in view of their long-term interests. This is why, no matter how difficult or lengthy the process of attaining them, these strategies are rarely changed. When the major powers united their efforts to establish the state of Israel, they did so in order to protect Western interests in the region. Israel would also serve as a means of dividing the Arab world, and as an obstacle to nascent national movements. The great powers endeavoured to introduce Israel into the Arab lands by every possible means.

The most important goal was to maintain a balance of power in Israel's benefit. Through the use of force, the state of Israel was established, and through force it must continue to impose its presence. Thus, following its inception at the end of the 1948 War and the truce signed in 1949, America, Britain and France issued the Tripartite Declaration, in which they pledged to work together against any attempt to occupy land in the region by force. They agreed to cooperate in an effort to ascertain that arms shipments to the Arab countries did not threaten Israeli interests.

At the time, there were no more than two million Israelis, with 50,000 active troops, a number which could be increased to 200,000 soldiers within 48 hours following the announcement of mobilisation. This army was equipped with more weapons than all the Arab armies put together. In addition, the Israeli forces' fighting capabilities were superior, due to their better training and their commanders' competence. This is why any breach of the existing balance was perceived as a threat to the interests of the Western powers, who blocked weapons shipments to any of the Arab countries endeavouring to break free of the fetters imposed by the Tripartite Declaration.

The arms deal with the Eastern bloc, signed on 20 May 1955 and announced by President Nasser on 27 September, was tantamount to a breach of the Western monopoly on arms sales, as well as a shattering blow to Western plans for an unjust peace between the Arab countries and Israel.

On the global level, the deal also served to rectify the balance of power between the Eastern and Western blocs. It brought a Soviet presence, with Soviet arms and experts, to the Mediterranean and the banks of the Suez Canal. This matter caused many analysts to consider this deal the principal reason for the Tripartite Aggression of 1956, following the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by Nasser. Christian Pineau, the then French foreign minister, denied that the West's chief concern during the crisis after the nationalisation of the Canal was to defend the interests of the nationalised companies. Pineau cited as reasons for the Tripartite attack the West's concern for strategy and freedom of navigation through the Canal. The West perceived that these were threatened by the Soviet presence following the arms deal with Egypt. The new order was indeed responsible for the transformation of the global map.

The then commander-in-chief of the Empire's forces expressed his distress that the Soviets had caught up, and overcome the barricades the Allies had established to impede them. The British deputy foreign minister for Middle East affairs wrote in a top secret memorandum that the Russians had been able to identify the weak points in Western Middle East policy — the presence of Israel as a Western protectorate — and had directed a powerful strike against it. The British estimated that Nasser was incapable of resisting the temptation held out by the Russians, which would serve to win over the rest of the Arab nations as well. They cautioned that their reaction would determine their fate in the region.

The arms deal of 1955, therefore, disrupted the balance of power at the global and regional levels. It triggered a terrifying arms race. In fact, the bipolar world order of the Cold War years, and even after Perestroika, was torn by a global arms race for the transfer of arms and technology. The Arab-Israeli conflict was fought out as a proxy conflict. It accomplished the objectives of the countries in the region directly, while indirectly achieving the goals of the two major powers. For this reason, crisis management, rather than resolution, was seen as the only reason of containing the obvious incompatibility in global issues between the two main sources of weapons.

With the breach in the arms monopoly, and the fundamental change in the nature of the conflict, it became imperative to find a new means of maintaining the balance of power in Israel's favour, to enable it to impose its own terms in a settlement with the Arabs. Furthermore, the strategy which dictated an embargo on arms supplies to the countries of the region had fulfilled its purposes after the Tripartite Aggression. Another strategy of destruction was adopted to neutralise the Arab arsenals. The arms race involved not only the accumulation of more powerful and more sophisticated arsenals, but the ability to sell the most weapons to client nations.

Because of the qualitative superiority of the Western arsenal, the Soviets were keen to develop their nuclear capability to US levels. They undertook to compete over the production of nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles. The Soviets were convinced that, if a global confrontation was going to take place, it would be a nuclear war. This emphasis on nuclear capabilities led to a further decline in the quality of conventional Soviet weaponry, so, while allegations that the Soviets refused to supply the Arab countries with more effective weapons are untrue, the weapons they did provide had been discredited on the battlefield. No attempt had been made to increase the potential of these weapons through creative management or sustained training.

The difference between Soviet-Arab and US-Israeli relations reflected the disparity in the regional balance of forces, and consequently affected the political outcome of any military confrontation.

Despite the Arabs' ability to purchase weapons and technology, the capacity to absorb them was inadquate at different levels of training, specialisation, and leadership. Several Arab countries have never participated in joint operations which would have gathered the arsenals on the same battlefield and thus allowed an estimate of their combined capabilities in warfare.

Arab strategists and military commanders did not attempt to study the succession of direct confrontations to which their armies were subjected in order to determine and enhance their strong points, or define their weaknesses so as to minimise them. On the contrary, they transformed their defeat into false victory, and any victory into a glaring defeat.

Conflict among Arab decision-makers as to which countries must be regarded as allies is at the root of many military mistakes. This confusion has been the source of continual confrontations and, therefore, the constant draining of Arab resources and capital.

There are signs that cannot be missed relating to the neutralisation of the Arab arsenals. Despite an abundance of different weapons, and the large portion of the budget devoted to defence, Arab national security is threatened from all sides. Yet the Arab armies are unable to confront these threats actively in battle, or to engage in deterrence operations. This means that the escalating cost of defence does not avert the threats directed at us, yet still continues to erode resources that could have been allocated to raising the population's standard of living. Heavy arsenals and high technology do not necessarily imply improved combat capabilities. There is no automatic link between the possession of weaponry and skill in putting it to use; this simple fact must be taken into account.

These problems have been further exacerbated by the US's attempts to further skew the balance of power — and maximise profit — by providing Israel with the most up-to-date military technology, while selling the Arabs defective or less effective arms. It also accepts that Israel possesses nuclear, biological and chemical capabilities while insisting that similar capabilities be destroyed if they are found in the possession of an Arab regime. Not that the Arab countries have shown any resistance in this respect: the destruction of the Iraqi arsenal was carried out with the knowledge and blessings of the Arab countries and the UN Security Council.

Once the US had neutralised Arab military capabilities effectively, it began to drain Arab resources. The Iraqi crisis is a good example. Whether or not a military strike is launched in the future, decimating both military and civilian targets, Iraq is crippled for decades to come. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are still settling bills for US protection, depleting their financial resources. At the same time, defence costs continue to rise and the US armaments sales are flourishing as never before. The blockade against Iran and Libya imposed under the D'Amato law grinds mercilessly on. Manipulation of world oil prices, devaluation of the US dollar from time to time, and the fomenting of unrest in order to encourage further arms purchases are all facets of US strategy.

At the end of the Cold War, it was said that the Arabs and Muslims had replaced the Soviet Union as the West's primary enemy. Developments on the ground since then seem to confirm this fear. The threats to Arab potential in terms of military capabilities and economic resources are now striking at the very integrity of the Arab countries themselves.

The principal oil-producing countries — Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Libya and Algeria — are either trembling on the verge of political disaster or emerging from a crisis: terrorist attacks, bloody civil wars... Escalating sales of weapons to these countries benefit only the West, reducing unemployment there; meanwhile, the cost of protecting Arab fuel for Western consumers is borne by the Arabs themselves, who foot the bill for the military bases, fleets, aircraft carriers and communication lines.

The US may threaten to launch a military strike on Iraq in order to paralyse its capabilities and destroy its arsenal. Its long-term objective is nothing less than the elimination of any resources the Arabs may still have. The US's strategy is aimed at depleting Arab capabilities, whether through the purchase of oil at prices dictated by the West, or through a military attack.

If the Arab leaders are unable to agree on their allies and enemies, they will remain incapable of achieving any measure of sustained success.

The writer is former minister of defence and chief of General Intelligence.

Settling unfinished business

Clinton may have deferred to the Security Council, but the real tests still loom ahead, writes **James Zogby**. A crisis resolution framework is in place, but the crisis has not passed

It was dangerous for the United States, out there on a limb, virtually alone in threatening the "sustained and decisive" bombing of Iraq. The negative consequences to the people of that country and to US allies and interests were too great. And the prospects of any positive outcome were, at best, negligible.

From the outset, the US president had said that the confrontation was not between the US and Iraq, but between the United Nations and Iraq. He repeatedly affirmed that a diplomatic solution was the best solution. Therefore, when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan succeeded in securing written Iraqi compliance with weapons inspections, the Administration could not but accept the agreement.

No sooner had success been announced in Baghdad, however, than Republican Senate leaders began attacking both the secretary-general and the president. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott criticised Clinton for having "subcontracted US foreign policy out to the UN." Other senators began plotting to make Clinton's "weakness" an issue to exploit in the 1998 elections.

The blatant partisanship of these attacks was as shocking as the absurdity of the arguments used. For example, the night the agreement was reached in Iraq, Republican Senator Arlen Specter, parroting the party line, had just announced that he would introduce a "feel-good, do-nothing" Senate resolution calling for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

In 1990, the senator, like many of his colleagues, had visited Baghdad and supported the Iraqi leader. More recently, on 28 January this year, he had co-sponsored the Senate bill that was to authorise the president to use force against Iraq. But on 12 February, Specter noted that he would not support the effort for three reasons: after attending four meetings in his state, he noted that his constituents were not supportive and "had concerns about our goals" in Iraq; recalling his travels throughout the Middle East, he noted that many in the region had commented on our "abuse of power" and "our arrogance" in dealing with other countries; and he noted that "we do not have the cooperation of others" in this attack on Iraq.

Now, less than two weeks later, with the Secretary-general of the United Nations having secured an agreement, the senator had somehow decided that it would be neither "arrogant" nor "abusive" for the Republican Senate to criticise the president and the United Nations. Specter indicated no sympathy for the suffering of the Iraqi people because, he said, "they are responsible for Saddam".

This Rambo-like mentality runs rampant among some of the so-called "experts" as well. With the crisis somewhat subsided, they have allowed their fantasies to run wild. For the most part, their views share a number of common denominators: they have no understanding of the reality of Iraq or the broader Middle East; what they propose are largely attempts to transpose Reagan-era Afghanistan and Nicaragua adventures onto Iraq; since none of these schemes will ever be used, their proponents can, without any sense of responsibility, propose whatever they will.

A former US ambassador, Edward Peck, made the most incisive comment of the week. When asked by the host of one TV show to evaluate one of these right-wing proposals, Peck said, "Well, I've been hearing such things from a number of people — people who don't know anything about Iraq, which, of course, is nothing to be ashamed of, unless they're talking about Iraq."

But with little shame and even less knowledge and responsibility, the Senate and its supporters will continue to challenge the president and the secretary-general. The administration may resist these efforts, but resisting is not enough. Kofi Annan created a framework for the resolution of the crisis, but the crisis has not yet passed.

Iraq will now be tested, and it must comply. If it is wise, the Iraqi regime will not only move decisively to comply and clear all of its outstanding files with the weapons inspection teams, it will also display a genuine readiness to resolve other outstanding UN resolutions.

The government in Baghdad should recognise recent gains in ending regional and international isolation. Through reform and reordered priorities, the government could help turn a new page in its regional relations — if it is wise.

The UN and the US will also be tested, however. If Iraq complies, the United Nations must signal its readiness to lift economic sanctions at a specified time. The Iraqi people have paid too dearly and too long for the crimes of their regime. While an arms control regimen and some element of containment and deterrence will remain in place indefinitely, food and medicine are not enough. The country must be allowed to rebuild its civilian infrastructure (water, sewage, electricity, health care, educational facilities, etc.).

For its part, the United States must be more forthcoming in its relations with the region. This past crisis should have made clear that the United States has serious work to do if it wants to win the "hearts and minds", not to mention the trust, of the Arab peoples. This is the battle that the United States must wage and win if its allies and interests are to be secure. The weapons in this war are justice and balance — and they must be applied across the board. A good place to begin, of course, is with a determined and dramatic new approach to the peace process. This will require more than half-steps and small percentages (13 per cent is as much an insult to Palestinian aspirations as 9 per cent). The United States must declare its principles and its vision for the future: an end to settlements on occupied land, the establishment of a Palestinian state, security for all based on normalised ties and justice, and a region free of all threats of war and weapons of mass destruction.

With the most recent crisis still fresh and wounds still open, there is no time like the present for real leadership to help move the region toward peace.

The writer is the director of the Washington-based Arab-American Institute.

Al-Ahram Weekly



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Go jump in the Nile

David Blake was waving, not drowning

Verdi's Aida: Cairo Opera Company, Cairo Opera Choir, Cairo Opera Ballet Company and Cairo Opera Orchestra; Ivan Filev, conductor; Abd Alla Saad, director; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 22, 23 and 25 February

It is no use telling your millionaire aunt to go jump in the river Nile, especially if she happens to be Aida, who is, after all, related to Isis herself. She will tell you directly, go *jump in yourself. Aunt Aida has* many powerful relations, so caution is best. Like an Indian goddess, she is a multi-armed deity, and a jab to the jaw by one of her arms is likely to prove a knock-out blow.

This almost happened with the fateful performances of Verdi's tough old masterpiece, *Aida* during its recent descent upon the Cairo Opera House.

Four performances were given, the first by an experienced home team. They turned in a splendid and dramatically highly-charged show. Came the second performance and a minor fate challenged the company — Auntie struck her first blow. The highly decorated international tenor, Renato Francesconi, went down with an unnamed virus, no voice, and in a few hours, without any rehearsal or preparation, the young Egyptian tenor, Walid Korayam, stepped in and saved Aida and her family from an operatic fate worse than death — a last minute cancellation. Show three went on without a tremor, *being a repeat of show one.*

But no joy reigned. No one can cheek an old trouper. The international tenor rose from his bed of pain, and appeared with visible effort and awful results in the fourth and last performance. He swam bravely on, but Act I saw him sinking fast for the last time and, within almost minutes, he was fished up out of the Nile by the same young Egyptian Walid Korayam who, again with complete success, even triumph, finished the remaining three acts. So *Aida* floated to victory thanks to him.

It takes more than a virus to keep *Aida* quiet. Everything sang on triumphantly. *Aida* is a curvy, cunning old opera. Nothing sinks it because its bone structure is made of Verdi's best stainless steel and it can survive a tidal wave of turmoils. *Aida* catastrophe tales haunt all major opera houses, and so the Cairo Opera House has now one of its own.

Verdi, half-way through the hours-long tale, suddenly changes the dramatic course and pressure. These pressures fall not on the heroine, but on to Rhadames and the unlucky daughter of the Egyptian pharaoh, mezzo-soprano Amneris. She and the tenor are given runaway scenes of tremendous theatrical power and sympathy, eclipsing all others in the opera.

This opera could easily be called *Amneris* instead of *Aida*. Verdi must have realised this, so gave the soprano Aida celestial phrases to sing at the end. But nothing could erase the tragic plight of Amneris and her battle with big power business — army, religion, religious prejudice and social injustice. Verdi was on home ground. The opera is a cautionary tale of when to know what not to do if you face the panoply of a conservative officialdom. Some go to heaven and some to prison.

The first of the four *Aidas* had Iman Mustafa and Hassan Kami in the leads. They know their roles and the roles know them. Mustafa goes from good to great: in fact, she seems to be another singer altogether from two years past. Taller, slimmer, poised and secure as an actress, confident musically, she uses her long, highly placed tones with discretion and purity. Her singing suggests exciting new areas to conquer. She might be the one to offer Cairo its first Norma.

Hassan Kami, at certain moments in all his roles, seems to chose scenes of nobility betrayed to accentuate. Rhadames is full of such opportunities, *and his caring phrases of* despair and love without hope were moving and dignified. He never swaggers or struts, and in tenor territory these are precious virtues.

The two home team *Aidas* were incident-free, set in newly worked scenes which do their best to steer between ancient stand-and-deliver opera. Orientalist *Aida*, and something some way new. The chorus gets moving and reacting. All the actions are tightened up to keep the strong plot always on the go and, musically, Ivan Filev knows his way through the Verdian score to accentuate always its beautiful clarity and precision.

And so the big stage fairly buzzed with activity. Gods and black granite figures loom and are lit by a sense of murky, ancient world unease. The columns in the big hall catch light from whatever suns and moons shone on all those embalmed pharaohs and their slaves. An effort is made not to strangulate a modern audience. Instead, a golden glow of ferocious *pharaonic activity is given.* We were in theatre space-time, not in the annex to a national museum.

Awatef El-Sharkawi is always an easy listen as Amneris, and she moves about grandly in space, as did Claude Rathle and Abdel-Wahab El-Sayed as the singers of the pharaohs of each of the four performances.

Listeners wait for Reda El-Wakil to begin his portentous sounds, the godfather of the priestly mafia. Lofty and quite nasty, he put the fear of all these thousands of gods into poor mortals. El-Wakil can be a crocodile or a fly. Some feat. Aida's father Amonasro, over-dressed in swathings of zebra and snake skins, looked a bit mangy. Probably correct, but the costume spoiled the performance of power of this role by both singers, Gaber El-Beltagui and the Russian import, Ivan Ponomarenko. They looked like people out of a travel-worn touring show, not characters from the Cairo Opera.

The two messengers in the tense little scene in which they tell of the peril approaching Memphis in the coming war was done *presto* and *con brio* by Tamer Tawfik and Mohamed Abu El-Kheir. The entire production, including the two catastrophe *Aidas*, was directed by Abd Alla Saad, whose imprint on opera productions generally has been apparent and refreshing. Gradually the ancient "classic" productions are receiving a shake-up by him. A new imagination is at work with no dust covers.

So too the two catastrophe *Aidas*. When Violette Makar made the announcement over the loudspeaker that there was to be a rescue job undertaken by Walid Korayam, the young Cairo tenor stepping in to cope with Rhadames, one of opera's great heroes, a tremor went through the regular audience. He is known as a singer of great physical gifts, sensitivity and dignity. And the voice? Another thing. Wayward, constricted, sometimes strangled, and mostly under pressure. Verdi, as usual, offers no help. So the opera opens with Rhadames doing his "celeste Aida", taking singer and actor through the mincer at the word go. Korayam used to belong to the old story in the music books: when he stood up to sing, they all laughed. But on this night he strode out on to the stage with the athletic tread of an Olympic gold medallist out to collect his winning trophy. Theatrical bravery in action. He looked magnificent in his handsome costume. Tall, relaxed, but powerful — every inch the army commander.

And the voice? It strode out of the shadows as well. It was free, open, and in perfect tune throughout the entire four acts. He managed every phrase with confidence, and moved around the stage as one who belonged to it, not a nervous stranger as before. His performance was sympathetic. The target of two women's love, he bore himself without the slightest trace of vanity, and looked gentle, but dangerous, a proper man, not a bad actor doing a comic run-through of an army type. The tragic, possessive love of Amneris gets on his nerves — and he shows it. He throws back his head in defiant answer to all her demands, patiently, understandingly, but terminally. You keep the trembling throne, you rule, but not over me or my love for Aida. He was a father figure to her, and she needed it. Bitter fate.

How Korayam came to embody all these elements is a mystery known only to the operatic stage. *Il arrive, il rest un peu, il depart — sans sign. Cocteauvian.* He had the support of Carol Byers as Aida, from the US and the big houses of Europe, to assist him. She too looked splendid, and her looks are backed by a powerful, beautiful voice and by musicality and expressiveness. She too knew exactly what she was about, and did it with great distinction. *Aida* needs moments of Verdian high *pianissimo* soprano tone dreaded by all singers. Byers sailed over the heights of the third act, midnight blue and lunar silver, then her voice darkened and deepened to the tragedy of this homeless, stateless wanderer buffeted from all sides by powers over which she has no control. She was bitter and beautiful as the opera proceeded. And by the end a new picture of Aida was made. Neither a heavy dramatic soprano nor a wilting lyric lying prone in the shadow of Amneris, but a real, fearful and struggling human creature forced by circumstances to the brink of madness. Wagner and Strauss are there for Byers's future attention.

Aida has a doppelganger in this opera — Amneris. And what a haunting creature does Hanan El-Guindi make of her. Again, tall, slim, elegant and dartingly forceful. She has a bright, high mezzo soprano and a presence impossible not to watch when she is on stage. Her princess is no stuck-up dowager, but young, quick moving, *mater dolorosa* of the unlooked-for miseries. She's lost, out of touch and reason, and abandoned. Even in the big Act II spectacular she threw herself into the demanding music with heroic courage for one so young. All the sympathy of a large audience went to her. She gave a star luminosity to all her scenes.

So the opera *Aida* came to Cairo. *Aida* of all people, no ancient aunt, no soliciting travel voucher from Luxor via outer space, but a tight, compact knock in the face from Ivan Filev, the living proscenium of the Cairo Opera House and a band of singers, young, full of courage and talent, about to spring their leaps into new areas, presented here in Cairo itself where they belong. Byers, El-Guindi, Korayam and the producer Abd Alla Saad — everything is possible with these talents. They belong to Cairo. But is Cairo ready for them? Birds fly if not nurtured.

Music for All; Cairo Opera Orchestra: Wolfgang Marschner and Mahmoud Osman, soloists; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 27 February

This was a concert for all, but all, unhappily, did not come. Some came and heard what might likely prove to be one of the loveliest concerts of the year. Beethoven's *Violin Concerto in D major, op 61* and Brahms's *Concerto for violin*, also in D major, op 79. Musical pleasures and portents are mysteries accountable to nothing and no one. But this small concert had everything. A matinée performance is always a pleasure, particularly if there are lots of children, two masterpieces, two master fiddlers to play them, the Cairo Opera Orchestra making a bit of musical history for itself and a conductor of greatness who can make anything work — Alain Margoni.

The Beethoven violin concerto is a classic monolith with a soft, warm and wild heart. Osman's playing is meticulously exact, sound and reverberate, and though the tone of the violin is never large it was always true.

The concerto is custom made for the player. Strong clear themes flowing into wide open crescendi, it is solid and warm, but never tragic, always Olympian. There are trills everywhere and cadenzas to enchant. The second movement was really exalted, an elegiac sunset, a string heaven with Osman easy and the tone of his violin broadening to a golden yellow haze like a painting of the end of the day by Poussin — a gloat in immortality. As if Beethoven distrusted too much heavenly immortality, the last movement is a dance of joy with tears to show how happy listening can be. Music is the perfect healer. Leave the street tumult, go straight into Music for All at the start of the dead men's rush of mid-afternoon traffic, and begin to live again.

The Brahms concerto brought a life traveller/worrier, Wolfgang Marschner. As Osman was almost Goethe-like in his Beethoven, Marschner was tumultuous Delacroix in his Brahms. Marschner is a wonder. At that certain age he still brings the wild and penetrating questioning spirit of what he was as a teenager. No matter if the tone goes a bit thin and hard worked here and there, no matter if there are finger stumbles — what power and energy he brings to every phrase he plays. The four movements seemed to spill over each other into one so eager were Margoni and Marschner to fill out the vast spaces of Brahms.

Throwing petrol over angels' wings is one of Brahms's hobbies. He sets fire to everything. There are no years to Brahms's music, nothing passes, sometimes it is so flat nothing seems to move at all. Then a splash of flame and life begins. We receive instant heavenly benediction.

Brahms's gray-blue oceanscape, Marschner's edgy enjoyment, and the whole concerto goes into a dance — a heavy, sweaty peasant stomp. Who but Brahms would dare this? But it works. Everyone's 20, and the concert is over.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Eric Bourret
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoquq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 6 March.
Photographs under the title Paysages Archéologiques.

Mohamed El-Awelly (Sculpture)
Centre of Art, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swisri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 9 March.

Youssef Assar (Paintings)
Main Hall, Al-Ahram Bldg, Al-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 578 6100-400. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 10 March.

Gazbia Sirry (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 10 March.
Exhibition entitled Lust For Colour.

Djehane Raouf (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 12 March.
Floral designs under the title I Will Survive.

Collective Exhibition
Sheba Gallery, Apt 1, 6 Sri Lanka St, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 12 March.
Watercolours and pastels of Cairo scenes by Monica Watson, embroidered mirrors by Judy Harper and a collection of abstract works using acrylics and multimedia by Judith Terluzzi.

Akhmim Arts & Handicrafts
Association of Upper Egypt for Education and Development, 65 Al-Obeissi St, Daher. Opening 5 March, 6pm. Daily 12noon-8pm. Until 12 March.
Products from the Community Centre of Akhmim and the Youth Centre of Hagaza.

Sherif Abdel-Badie
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 13 March.

Abdel-Aziz El-Guindi (Paintings)
Ragab Gallery, 3 Al-Nil St, behind Cairo Sheraton, Giza. Daily 9am-3pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 15 March.

Collective Exhibition
Italian Cultural Institue, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 18 March.
Photographs of Yemen by architect Sonato Lorusso, of Usbekistan by Lucio Rispoli and of Italy by Hany El-Goweily.

Gamil Shafiq (Drawings) & **Halim Yacoub** (Sculpture)
Khan El-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 20 March.

Mounir El-Shaarani (Calligraphy)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 20 March.

Mohsen Shaalan (Paintings)
Spiro Arts Gallery, 6 Rd 77C, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 351 4362. Opening 5 March, 7pm. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 22 March.

The Greeks of Alexandria (Photographs)
General Consulate of Greece in Alexandria, 63, Al-Eskandar Al-Akbar St, Shatby, Alexandria. Daily exc Sun, 4pm-8pm; Sat 10am-1pm. Until 22 March.

Salah Enani (Paintings)
Akhnatoun Gallery I, Centre of Art, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swisri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 22 March.
Works under the title Open Buffet.

Maria Adamantidis
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Opening 11 March, 7pm. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 23 March.
A photographic tour of the Greek establishments in Cairo under the title The Greeks and Cairo: Places of the Heart.

Rehab El-Sadek
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 26 March.
Works under the title Pages From Old Times.

Bernard Guillot
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Main Campus, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 March.
Thrity-one black and white photographs under the title Egypt: A Fertile Land of scenes from the countryside in the Egyptian Delta.

Said El-Sadr
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 26 March.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Gundi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.

FILMS

Jules Dassin Film Festival
Salvago Theatre, Greek School, 63 Al-Eskandar Al-Akbar St, Shatby, Alexandria.
5 March, 7.30pm: **Christ Recrucified** (1956).

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791
7 March, 7pm: **Ladri Di Saponette**, directed by M. Nichetti.
8 March, 7pm: **Mediterraneo** (1990), directed by G. Salvatores.

Wim Wenders Films
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 575 9877. 6.30pm.
9 March: **Alice in the Cities** (1973)
10 March: **Same Player Shoots Again** (1967).
11 March: **Summer in the City** (1970).

Notice:
Commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday. The information provided is valid through to Tuesday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Titanic
Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6.30pm & 9.30pm; Thur & Fri midnight show. ***Ramsis Hilton I****, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm.* ***MGM****, Kolleyat Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Radio****, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*

Tomorrow Never Dies
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. ***Tiba II****, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.* ***Metro****, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*
Pierce Brosnan stars as the new 007.

Mr Bean
Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. ***El-Haram****, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Al-Salam****, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.* ***Karim I****, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*



Salah Enani

Air Force 1
Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Ressala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. ***Cosmos I****, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Roxy****, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Tiba I****, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.* ***Sphinx****, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.*
With Adel Imam and Youssra.

Tamania wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. ***Cosmos II****, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Diana****, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Rivoli I****, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.*

Hysteria
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. ***Lido****, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Miami****, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. ***Karim II****, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*
The largest box-office hit in the history of Egyptian cinema.

DANCE

Swan Lake Ballet
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8132. 6 March, 8pm.
The Cairo Opera Ballet Company and the Cairo Opera Orchestra perform Tchaikovsky's composition, choreographed and directed by Abdel-Moneim Kamel and conducted by Moustafa Nagui.

MUSIC

Musicat
Al-Harrawi House, behind Al-Azhar Mosque, Al-Hussein. Tel 340 7001. 5 March, 5pm.
The first Anglo-Egyptian band composed exclusively of women (Nesma Abdel-Aziz, percussion; Jo Freya, clarinet, whistle, saxophone and vocals; Alice Kinloch, trombone and tuba; Engy Salah, snoot; Yasmine Sater, vocals and oud) performs selections from Sayed Darwish, Ali Ismail, popular English songs and Franco-Arab music.

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 5 March, 9pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Youth Choir & the Big Band of the Conservatoire
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8132. 7 March, 8pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above 7 March, 8pm.
Compositions by Beethoven, El-Shawan and Brahms, with piano soloist Bengt Ake Lundin, conducted by Sayed Awad.

Musical Youth Association
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 8 March, 9pm.

THEATRE

El-Tayeb Wel-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
Al-Salam Theatre, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm; Thur, 9.30pm.
With Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar, Mahmoud El-Guendi, Ashraf Abdel-Baqi, Hala Fakher, Hussein El-Imam, Hassan El-Asmar and Sommaya.

Allahom Eg'aloh Kheir (May All End Well)
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 390 7707. Daily 9.30pm.
Scripted by Lenin El-Ramly, with poetry by Sayed Hegab, the play is directed by Mohsen Helmy. With Ali El-Haggar, Rania Farid Shawqi, Ashraf Abdel-Ghafour, Abdel-Rahman Abu Zahra.

Alabanda
Al-Fardous Theatre, Al-Bouuth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Waleieddin, Magda Zaki, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
Al-Haram Theatre, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 3863952. Daily 8.30; Wed & Thur, 10pm.
With Adel Imam.

LECTURES

Is a Late Medieval Triptych in the Coptic Museum Crusader, Armenian or Coptic?
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arab Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 5 March, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Zuzana Skálová, Coptic icons expert.

Studies on Ptolemaic History and Civilization
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 5 March, 6pm.
Presentation of the book by the same title by Professors Lotfy Abdel-Wahab and Aleia Hanafi, with guest of honour poet Mohamed Ibrahim Abu Senna. The talk will be followed by the screening of **Cleopatra** (p. I), directed by Mankiewicz.

Excavations and New Discoveries in the Tomb of Ramses II (KV7) in the Valley of the Kings
Room 203, Rare Books and Special Collections Library, American University in Cairo, corner of Al-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5060. 8 March, 5pm.
Lecture by Christian B Leblanc, director of the French mission to Western Thebes. The lecture is in conjunction with the exhibition entitled "Homage to Howard Carter: An Exhibition Celebrating 75 Years of Exploration and Discovery in the Valley of the Kings."

Family Rituals of Life and Death
Egypt Exploration Society, British Council, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 8319. 9 March, 7pm.
Lecture by Patricia Spencer, secretary of the Egypt Exploration Society, London.

"Avenues of Participation": A Discussion with the Author
CEDEJ, 14 Dr Abdel-Rahman Al-Sawi St (ex-Gam'eyet Al-Nisr St), Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 10 March, 5pm.
Discussion by Professor Diane Singerman, American University, Washington DC.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Mohamed Shaker

AFRICA is the source of inspiration for technically accomplished paintings in a variety of media by **Mohamed Shaker** on show at the **Spanish Cultural Centre**.

Meanwhile, the ample gallery space at **Al-Hanager**, on the Opera House grounds, is given over to paintings and pastel and pencil drawings by **Magda Saad El-Din**. Though well-intentioned in their attempts at simplicity, these too often miss their mark and leave the viewer with the impression of compositional superficiality.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

"A homeland and a passion"

Abdel-Rahman Mounif, winner of the prize awarded by the First Cairo Conference on the Arabic Novel, presented his testimony as a novelist to participants. Below are extracts



Abdel-Rahman Mounif receives the Cairo Award for Fiction Writing from Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni; right, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Culture Dr Gaber Asfour



photos: Mousa Mahmoud

Abdel-Rahman Mounif: Born in the Arabian Peninsula in the 1930s of a Saudi Arabian father and Iraqi mother; spent his formative years in Amman, Jordan; obtained his BA in Law from Cairo University; PhD in oil economics from Belgrade University; had his Saudi Arabian citizenship withdrawn; has lived in many capitals of the Arab world and Europe and is now based in Syria; novels include *Sharq Al-Mutawassit* (East of the Mediterranean), *Al-Nihayat* (Endings), the quintet *Mudun Al-Malh* (translated into English by Peter Theroux under the title *Cities of Salt*), *Qissat Hub Magousiyya* (A Magian Love Story), *Al-Aan Huna, Aw Sharq Al-Mutawassit Marra Ukhra* (Now and Here: East of the Mediterranean Revisited); non-fiction includes *Sirat Madina* (A Biography of a City)

"I came to fiction-writing quite late in life, turning to it after I grew weary of the dominant politics of the time. I came to the novel as a refugee, almost certain that this was a whim, a brief respite after which I would return, once again, to politics, to change the world. But as I was to realise quite quickly, my late arrival to the novel was not a mistake, because fiction-writing, like all other mediums of expression, calls for... life experience, including failure sometimes, and my own political experience... had taught me a great deal. I also came to understand that the novel can never be a mere station, a crossing: either it becomes an eternal homeland, or it cannot be. Fiction-writing does not lend itself to being a margin, or a temporary respite; it cannot be a whim or a settling of scores with a given regime or the political establishment. No sooner do you enter the expanses of the novel than you become its captive and it becomes your world, your passion and dreams, and quite possibly everything for you. Even the desire to change the world is conditioned by it, for one of the criteria of that desire is that the novel should exist, that it should be sound, and that the world should be discovered and understood anew through the novel as a prelude to effecting change.

It seem to me at times that whoever has a passion for the novel can find no substitute for it... nor can he bear life without it. Thus, embarking on a novel is in itself the objective and target. Even the subject-matter of the novel — any novel — is often no more than a cause, a *raison d'etre* for the novelist to continue. For if silence prevails, loneliness closes in, and then comes emptiness, and then the end. The novel, then... is a homeland and a passion before all else.

The novel, for whoever has not undergone it, is a hardship, a suffering unlike any other. And yet it is a pleasurable, creative and sometimes surprising suffering for in the end it yields something that even its creator had not expected, and this is what keeps the novelist going in this dangerous adventure. As for this change, which was a primary motive for turning to the novel after politics, we must admit that the world we live in holds failure and disenchantment, as well as stolen pleasures, as to make us discontented. It is, therefore, for us to articulate this bravely, in a clear, loud voice, and to call on ourselves and on others to find a more beautiful and more humane formula for life.

As long as one is alive one should make every effort to render life less bland, and less ugly, if that is, one cannot make it exceedingly beautiful and enjoyable.

Among the reasons why the Arab novel has emerged as the prime medium for expression is the big defeats that began in 1948. These defeats revealed the extent of our illusions and blinkering, and allowed us to perceive reality in a new way. They also created movement in this stagnant Arab swamp and one question after the other burst forth. The novel is the biggest and most important repository of questions, because it rereads the status quo, flees certitudes, seeks out possibilities, sounds out other facets. Thus we find that the Arab novel, in its entanglement with real life, broaches questions and never claims for itself the exclusive ability to provide answers. And this may be the ideal method for many to cooperate in searching for what is lost, without the spirit of prophecy or the illusions of the whole truth.

In this sense, the broaching of political questions in the Arab novel is both an expression of the status quo and of a dire need. This is why I turned my attention from the start to political detention in its capacity as one of the symbols of the times, then to petroleum as the curse that envelops Arab reality in its entirety, from the Ocean to the Gulf, and which continues to expose us, on a daily basis, to punishment on various levels. The 1967 defeat made me turn to fiction-writing not as an escape, but as a means of confrontation. The defeat had an impact that can never be forgotten. An Arab world of this vastness and this potential, and also with this huge quantity of slogans and clamour, suddenly falling and collapsing, and not in six days, but in the space of a few hours. The defeat threw into relief the grave contradictions in the Arab situation...

Social disparities and contradictions throughout the Arab world are such that neutrality is impossible, particularly since deafness and backwardness characterise the ruling classes... We should therefore stand by the downtrodden, the abused, the oppressed, and not allow ourselves to become an instrument in the hands of the ruling classes or mouthpieces for the rich or servants in the foreign circles that would have us remain backward.

One should make reference here to two forms of censorship that hamper the growth of the novel: the censorship exercised by society and that exercised by the state. If state censorship is understandable, if unacceptable for the most part, then what of society's censorship? The oppressed also practice all the forbidden things in secret and enjoy them to the full in daily life — through swear words, gossip, scandals and nude photos — even while they forbid the novelist from writing about any of this. Arab society is one of the strangest of societies, because it practices all manner of things secretly and yet fears that a single word, no matter how indirect, should be said or written about this secret life. It is the task of the novel to head straight there, to the secret life, to try and expose it and to exhort people in a resonant voice: be brave and confess. But that the writer, particularly the novelist, submit to this general hypocrisy and resort to concealment when all is known to others, this would be a form of complicity and acquiescence.

The more courageous the novel, regardless of its subject matter, the more it can shake the rotten roots, clean away the thick layers of dust and become an instrument of discovery, of knowledge, of freedom... In this respect, I often call upon the daring of our forefathers who have said many things we would not dare to say now, and who confronted courageously those who tried to impose taboos... Why then should we not try to break the taboos and create a general atmosphere that nurtures these attempts, not for the sake of sensationalism but to let the sun into all corners so that it can light up all aspects of life...

But to return to my experience as a novelist, to my first novel and the one I'm writing now. My first novel was a step in the dark, a testimony which was, to an extent, autobiographical. But no sooner was it complete than the big worry began: what is to be written now, and how? And with the attempt to answer these two questions, anxiety and worry increase. It is no secret that every new novel is more difficult than the one before it, constituting a greater challenge to the novelist and the endeavour of fiction-writing because the process of searching and discarding calls for a great deal of experience and exertion. I have tried, from very early on, to keep one cardinal question always before my eyes: to what kind of novel do I aspire? I searched quietly, assiduously, for a formula, or a number of formulas, that could constitute the novel. In my... novel, *Al-Ashgar Wa Ightiyal Marzouk* (Trees and the Assassination of Marzouk), I recoursed to myth, in *Sharq Al-Mutawassit* (East of the Mediterranean), I sought a polyphony of voices, continued my search in *Al-Nihayat* (Endings) where I made the short-story part of the novel, and tried with my friend Jabra [Ibrahim Jabra] ... to open up a new horizon for the Arab novel by co-authoring *'Aalam Bila Kharait* (A World Without Maps). In place of the human being, or alongside him, I made of animals my heroes in a number of novels, including *Al-Ashgar, Al-Nihayat, Hin Tarakna Al-Gisr* (When We Left the Bridge). I also tried to give place a human dimension, so to speak. When the land is treated with cruelty it screams, calls for help, protests. When the machines thrust their claws into the palm trees in *Mudun Al-Malh* (Cities of Salt), for example, the trees resist, challenge the machines and, losing out in this confrontation, scream and weep before they fall, in an attempt to be one with the earth once again. The same can be said about the single, individual hero [in my works]. For if my first novel revolved around a single hero, the later novels search for a hero and heroism of a different order. This is what I attempted specifically in *Mudun Al-Malh* where every character who appears is, in a sense, a hero — of a particular situation, for a span of time or of a given state of being... And this can be a path for the Arab novel, drawing on the old traditions of Arab narrative, and this is what I suggest should be attempted by novelists.

I have recently become less inclined towards ideology, in favour of a greater interest in popular culture. With its linguistic richness, the diversity of its sources, its historical vistas, popular culture can lead us to the heart of things...

Today, the Arab novel is better than it was yesterday and tomorrow it should be even better than it is today. This necessitates that we should tolerate each other, that we should accept a variety of techniques, that we should make room for experimentation. It may well be the good-fortune of the Arab novel that it does not need a prince or a priest to accomplish it.

Translated by **Hala Halim**

Texts and tiffs

Mahmoud El-Wardani provides an overview of the First Cairo Conference on the Arabic Novel — widely hailed as a great success

The last chapter of the First Cairo Conference on the Arabic Novel (22 to 26 February) closed with the distinguished novelist Abdel-Rahman Mounif receiving the Cairo Award for Fiction Writing. Among the members of the jury, headed by Ihsan Abbas, were Fathi Ghanem, Al-Tayeb Saleh, Mahmoud Amin El-Alim, Tewfik Bakkar, Youmna El-Id, Radwa Ashour, Faisal Darraj and Abdel-Hamid Dirwass. The award itself comprises the sum of LE50,000 and a certificate of merit.

Egypt's launching of the conference stands as testimony to the flourishing of fiction writing in the Arab world. The conference was originally scheduled for December 1997, but had to be postponed in view of the huge quantity of submissions for the award which the jury was hard-pressed to read in time.

Over the period of five days at the venue of the conference, the Greater Cairo Library in Zamalek, it was hectic popping in and out of sessions for the many conferees and speakers, be they writers, academics or Arabists. Between the plenary sessions, the round-table discussions and testimonies of novelists, some of which overlapped, the choice was far from easy.

In all, 18 sessions were held, exploring the following themes: "The Specificity of the Arab Novel", "In Search of Specificity", "The Arab Novel and the Question of Identity", "Anti-novel-centrism", "The Arab Novel from an International Perspective", "The Novel and Heritage", "The Arab Novel in its Local Manifestations", "Modernist Novels and Modernism", "Feminist Novels", "The Text and the Unspeakable Sub-text", "The Novel and the Aesthetics of Reception", "Autobiography and the Autobiographical Novel", "The Political and Social Imagined", "The Novel and History", "Alienation and the Relationship with the Other", "Novels of the Desert" and "The Prison Novel".

Among the main issues worthy of special attention was "Anti-novel-centrism". The session, moderated by Arabist Roger Allen, began with a paper by Saudi Arabian critic Abdallah Al-Ghozami on the novel *4-0* by Ragaa Alem. Throughout her fictional project, Alem has espoused a counter writing that would subvert the masculine narrative paradigm. This she has done through the ploys of title, numbering and linguistic units to leave a fragmentary text on which the reader is unleashed in search of meaning. The next speaker, Dr Sabry Hafez, in his paper entitled "Anti-novel-centrism and the Aesthetics of Post-Modern Narrative", offered a comparative reading between the nineties generation and the Naguib Mahfouz one with the aim of showing that the marginalisation of the self in the forerunner's works led to the proliferation of the writing of the body among the new generation. In the same session the Egyptian writer based in Switzerland, Fawzeya Asaad, presented a highly confused and confusing paper which shifted back and forth between novelists Bahaa Taher and Naguib Mahfouz, and faced a severe depletion of the audience. Lebanese critic Rashid Al-Daif tackled post-sixties fiction writing in Lebanon which spanned trends as diverse as the novel of political activism and magic realism.

Organised by critic and novelist Dr Radwa Ashour, the five round table discussions focused on such topics as "Issues of Formation", "Realism and Its Alternatives", "The Novel and History", "Women's Novels" and "The Arab Novel in Translation". In the round table discussion of "Women's Novels" Lebanese novelist Nagwa Barakat explained that the autobiographical novel is a feminist work in the sense that it narrates the preoccupations of women. Nevertheless, writing for her, she explained, was a form of freedom and within every woman are a thousand men and it is unfair to be continuously on the look out for feminist attributes in every text written by a woman. Egyptian fiction writer Itidal Othman brought out the multiplicity of trends within current women's writing. There are works, she explained, that reconfirm the stereotypes about women, others that link women's experience with the general and the national and yet another category that derives from oral, popular narratives which creates a link between the various literary registers.

Egyptian novelist Raouf Mossaad was very strident in his comments, which he prefaced with the observation that there had been misconceptions in some of the things said and that more accuracy should be sought. Through his own readings of women's writings, he said, he found a literature replete with depression and incapable of achieving anything beyond reproducing what has already been written.

"I have not found...in autobiographies anything that has revealed to us this secret, unknown world." Feminist writer Nawal El-Saadawi responded angrily: "Why is it that men ridicule women's issues? Everything is topsy turvy... it's been 35 years I have not spoken in my homeland, as I have had occasion to abroad... I am against the 'specificity' of women's novels. There is no specificity for any kind of literature...These are contrived issues." Of the new generation, fiction writer May El-Telmesani spoke against the charge of marginalisation for, if indeed some categories were marginalised, this was not the case with women writers who elicit applause with every new publication.

Eight sessions of testimonies brought 30 writers from all over the Arab world representing various generations and trends. Of these the most important may well be the one which witnessed a display of mutual animosity between Syrian novelist Hanna Mina and Libyan writer Ibrahim Al-Kouni. In this session, Gamal El-Ghitani explained that "despite my complete awareness of the drift towards mortality in all things I continue to try and leave a mark, and what I write is that mark."

Algerian novelist Ahlam Mostanghanemi commented that "when you are an Algerian writer and Algeria visits you everyday with its caravans of the dead, you must ask yourself about the point of writing." Hoda Barakat from Lebanon made of the hero of her novel *Ahl Al-Hawa* (The Lovers) an example of the blurred boundaries between the "I" of the author and the "other" of the fictional character, finally posing the question: "Which of us is more true? I or the fictional character?"

The session closed with the aforementioned quarrel. Libyan novelist Al-Kouni, drawing on François Mauriac and Dostoyevsky in his testimony, elicited an outburst from Mina who pointed out that Al-Kouni had failed to show any link between Dostoyevsky and the Arab world and had indeed overlooked the issues of the Arab world in his own works.

"Some of what you say is indeed primitive," interrupted Al-Kouni, whereupon Mina, getting up to leave, threw sarcastically over his shoulder: "Since you find my words primitive, let me then bow before the genius of your philosophy."

However, this was the only such incident in a conference that was an unqualified success. There is no doubt that the event allowed for a rare face-to-face dialogue between the key figures in the field of Arab fiction writing, in addition marking the launch of a 5-volume bibliography of the Arabic novel, compiled by Dr Hamdi El-Sakkut of AUC. In the closing ceremony, Dr Gaber Asfour found further cause for jubilation, apart from the success of the conference, in the resolution of the Iraqi crisis. He also disclosed that the minister of culture had decided to add an award to future conferences for the best novel to have appeared in the past two years.

Plain Talk

I have often wondered about what African writers, particularly South African writers, would choose as the subject matter of their novels, short stories or poems after independence, a question one could ask regarding Palestinian writers after peace. Nor am I the only one asking this question.

I recently read a revealing interview with Nadine Gordimer, Nobel and Booker prize winner, in which she was asked: "Is there literary life after Apartheid?" After all, the interviewer must have been thinking, the best novels, short stories and poems produced by writers like Alex Laguma, Garder, Nzuzu and others dealt with the problem of Apartheid.

I knew Laguma quite well when I was deputy secretary-general of the Afro-Asian Writers Union and we attended numerous conferences together. Laguma was a black South African, while Gordimer was white. Both were in the same group of writers who vehemently opposed the government's policy of Apartheid.

Gordimer's interviewer believed that "deprived of the familiar landscape of Apartheid, her step has faltered." Nadine Gordimer's answer was apt and in many ways reflected not only the problem of South African literature, but also that of African literature at large. African writers, she suggested, were not writing for African, but for Western readers, within the context of a vestigial colonialism. On the one hand, the colonialists' languages were superimposed on local languages; while, on the other, there is a high percentage of illiteracy among local African peoples.

What Gordimer says is quite revealing. Western readers interest was in "something called Apartheid. They were projecting on South Africa many of their own prejudices... and they wanted to see how other people worked it out. We can't offer them that anymore, but the whole of the rest of life is what we are living."

I may be mistaken, but I see some similarities between post-Apartheid and post-colonial African writers, on the one hand, and post-Cold War writers in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, on the other. Having worked as cultural counsellor in three socialist countries — Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany — I could see and feel the dilemma of the writers and artists there. There may be a difference here in that while some African writers were writing against a system, the Eastern writers, if one might call them so, were writing for a system.

I suppose the problem that is facing both groups of writers has to do with the kinds of subjects with which their writings can now deal. Nadine Gordimer summed it up beautifully when she said that life did not stop after the end of Apartheid. "Indeed," she added, "life has opened up. There are so many new situations, living there now you see it, whether it's two kids aged six and seven going to school together for the first time, a black one and a white one. And how they will grow up to think about one another. What's going to happen at their adolescence, are the old prejudices going to come in?... You know, I could think of a dozen situations that could come up, that I hope are going to be written about as they happen."

The British press is now reviewing Gordimer's latest novel *None to Accompany Me*. This novel situates itself within the setting of "the fluid social landscape of the new South Africa. Her fodder here is the ambiguities kicked up by the dismantling of the old pecking order."

Did her writings influence the government of South Africa? Did she play a role in the ending of Apartheid? She does not think so. "I think one has to be realistic," she says. "I don't think that writers anywhere, for a long time, have a real influence."

"Perhaps," she continues, "we had a heartening effect... But we didn't influence the government because they banned us or ignored us. I don't think any writers, since the generation of Jean-Paul Sartre and Camus in France, have influenced a government."

Mursi Saad El-Din

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A life extraordinary

As the world prepares to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March, Ragi Halim commemorates a woman remarkable not for her fearless activism, but for her quiet accomplishments: a lifetime's tireless work in botany, and more subtle, but nonetheless abiding, achievements in promoting cultural understanding

Vivi Takholm was born Vivi Laurent in Djursholm (near Stockholm) on 7 January 1898, and died in Stockholm on 3 May 1978. The first 28 years of her life were spent studying and preparing, as if for a mission; the next 52 years were devoted to serving Egypt. Aged 28, she came to Egypt, the young wife of the first professor of botany in the newly created Faculty of Science of the Egyptian (now Cairo) University. Her husband, Gunnar Wilhelm Takholm, died young (1891-1933), but Vivi stayed on, as if to complete the mission they had undertaken together.

Last month, an Egyptian-Swedish symposium was held to commemorate this remarkable woman who, for 80 years, displayed a remarkable constancy. "A humane person with the heart and spirit of a nun, an artist with the heart and fantasy of a poet, and a scholar par excellence, with the vision and courage of pioneer scientist:" this elegy was pronounced by Abdel-Fattah El-Qassass, a senior consultant for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the first of her many disciples.

She gave all her attention and concern to others: her students and associates, her assistants at university, her cook and housekeeper. Her income from various sources (the university salary, her pension from Sweden, royalties from books, donations from friends...) was always given away. Her own material comfort was low, or inexistent, on the list of her priorities.

In the late '50s, her friends in Sweden and Egypt collected money to present to her on the occasion of her 60th birthday. She decided, almost spontaneously, to use this money to finance a trip to Sweden with her "children": eight of her postgraduate students. She planned for six to spend the summer in university and research institutes in Sweden, while two would stay on to obtain their doctorate: one in plant physiology (the late professor A. Abdel-Fadil) and one in cytology and genetics (Professor W. K. Henein, the former president of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature). All her students went on to glorious scientific careers in botany.

Vivi gave generously. Whenever one of her assistants, or a member of their families, was ill, she sent them to a private hospital in Old Cairo where they were treated at her expense. This boundless generosity, on occasion, put her in debt beyond her means. When her colleagues suggested that a government hospital would be more appropriate, she refused. "To her, anyone who worked with her, in whatever way, was important and a dear friend who should be comfortable and receive good treatment when he was sick," says Warda Bleser Bircher, an intimate friend of Vivi's and the former owner of the famous Middle Egypt Botany Station.

Her yearly Christmas party on 24 December was always eagerly anticipated. "Friends brought their children, there were guests of all nationalities. Everyone received a present that was very personal, mainly drawings expressing her great affection, and everyone had his fortune told in a manner that inspired optimism. These were happy moments for Vivi and her friends," Warda remembers.

Her generosity was not only material: she deeply wanted to share her knowledge and feelings with others. After her graduation she spent a year travelling extensively in North America. She recorded her memories of this experience in two volumes, *Vivi's Journey*, published in 1923-24. Between 1923 and 1926, she was a member of the editorial staff of *Nordisk Familjebock* (The Nordic Family Book), and she wrote articles for various Stockholm newspapers. This gave her an experience of public communication that remained with her for the rest of her life.

"Parties of Swedish tourists who came to Cairo had on their schedule visits to the Egyptian Museum, the Pyramids and Vivi Takholm. They came to her flat and she told them stories of Ancient Egypt. Meeting Vivi was one of the most memorable parts of their visit to Cairo," says Ian Thesleff, from the Swedish Embassy.

"As I saw her talking to these groups of men and women, I saw a very different woman from Professor Vivi Tackholm, lecturing to her students on plant taxonomy and the flora of Egypt. Here, she was like a poet reciting: she seemed charged with intense feelings and emotions about what she was narrating and conveyed all this to a mesmerised audience," remembers El-Qassass.

For the benefit of these tourists and for the Swedish public, she wrote six books about Egypt, its history and people: *Egypt in Close View*, 1964; *Pharaoh's Children*, 1965; *Everyday Life in Egypt*, 1966; *Living Antiquity*, 1967; *The Desert in Flower*, 1969; and *Fairytale Minarets*, 1971.

In these books she related her personal experience in Egypt and displayed her remarkable knowledge of Egyptian history. These books, as well as her encounters with parties of Swedish tourists and visitors, her lectures in Sweden during her rare summer visits, and her daily life at the university made her Egypt's best ambassador of Egypt to Sweden as well as Sweden's best ambassador to Egypt for over 50 years.

In 1926, she wrote her first book on natural history for children, *The Saga of Snipp, Snapp, and Snorum*, an instant classic that was reprinted a number of times, the last time in 1976. Her last in this series of books for children, *Lillian's Journey to the Moon: Fairy Tales for Old and Young*, was published in 1976. These books bore all her love for children and combined good science with wonderful fantasy.

Vivi Laurent obtained her doctoral degree in botany (embryology) in 1921 from the Stockholm Hogskolas. During the few years (1926-29) she and her husband spent together in Cairo, the young and enthusiastic couple realised that they had three priorities: to build a reference collection of the flora of Egypt, to write a systematic description of all the plants they could find and classify, and to train young Egyptian scientists in plant taxonomy. For the rest of her life, Vivi remained ardently committed to these three interconnected objectives. When she died in 1978, 52 years after she had first set foot in Egypt, she had met all three. Her legacy included three monuments: the Vivi Takholm herbarium and library; *The Flora of Egypt*; and the Egyptian school of plant taxonomy.

El-Qassass comments: "Vivi and Gunnar spent from 1926 to 1929 collecting and curating plant materials from various parts of Egypt. Their collection, some 10,000 herbarium sheets, formed the nucleus of the University Herbarium. Especially between 1947 and 1978, Vivi worked tirelessly to build up the herbarium. Duplicates of earlier collections gathered by pioneer explorers and materials from other herbaria were also added. Rich collections from the Egyptian deserts, the Sudan, Libya, Jordan, East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen enriched the herbarium.

When Vivi gave her last lecture on 4 March 1978, her voice echoed through a herbarium that housed more than 250,000 specimens, including some 200 types of flora from Egypt and the Middle East.

Associated with this herbarium, Vivi Takholm also built up a large library. The nucleus were books and periodicals from the main library of the Faculty of Science. She often described herself as the "biggest beggar, however, because she relentlessly asked for books, and she received flows of book donations," says El-Qassass.



The herbarium has become an active centre of botanical research in plant taxonomy, the flora of Egypt, ecological surveys of Egypt and archaelobotany. The latter field linked the herbarium with archaelogical excavations all over Egypt.

She and M Darar were also the principal scientists advising and assisting the development of Cairo's botanical gardens: Al-Orman, Al-Zohriya, Al-Qubba, and the Botanic Island of Aswan. Her helping hand was extended to all the universities and research institutions of Egypt.

To write *The Flora of Egypt* was the principal mission of Vivi in her incarnation as a scientist. To prepare herself for what became her life-long occupation, she spent 1929 to 1933 surveying Egyptian plant collections in European herbaria.

The Flora of Egypt, as she conceived it, was not just a taxonomic treatise on the plants of Egypt, it was an encyclopaedic work that would gather a wealth of information related to every plant. In her preface to the first volume (1941), she writes: "The vegetation of Egypt is not restricted to wild plants. Egypt is an agricultural country, and it would give quite a false view of the flora if one did not deal also in this connection with Egyptian crops... [especially] the peculiar crops which probably arose in this country and are endemic here since ancient times".

In his forward to the second volume, the then dean of science, professor H Efflatoum, enumerated several "special and most commendable" attributes of *The Flora of Egypt*. Among these attributes was the fact that the work dealt in detail with uses of various plants in ancient and modern times, with special attention to pharmacological uses. These treatments included reviews of extensive literature and spanned a period from Ancient Egypt to the present.

As Vivi designed it, this encyclopaedia could not but be a long-term project: it took over 20 years to complete. Her students, therefore, asked her to write a handy volume that they could use in the classroom and in the field. She obliged. The *Student's Flora of Egypt* was first published in 1956. A second revised edition was published in 1974. This was a normal flora with very well-designed keys, brief and clear descriptions and many illustrations.

Vivi Takholm, then, left her mark, in the scrupulous descriptions and classifications that make up her life's work, and in the hearts of her students, scattered throughout the world today: the best example, perhaps, of her skill at academic and cultural cross-pollination.



What black cat?

My mother is superstitious. So were my father and my maternal grandmother. My mother believed that open scissors left on tables, ladders under which one walked and Friday the 13th were bad luck. My father claimed that ugly faces seen in the morning brought bad tidings. As for my grandmother, she was convinced that people with certain physical deformities had the power to cast spells, and I think she also suspected our next-door neighbours of exploring mild forms of witchcraft in their spare time.

I, on the other hand, was a healthy child. My worst nightmares basically revolved around someone devouring my favourite cake before I could get to it. I snickered when told to walk around — not under — a ladder, and to place the soap on its dish, not hand it to my brother.

As a teenager, I developed an attitude towards superstitious relatives and did my very best to show all and sundry that I did not believe in old wives' tales. I spent hours spying on our neighbours and their mentally challenged child, who used to dance strangely in the garden, waving handkerchiefs. I told my grandmother that we had become best friends and that I would soon be invited there to tea. I deeply enjoyed her troubled look. I searched high and low for black cats, never waiting for them to cross my path — I hastened to cross theirs first. I also made it a point to walk back and forth under every ladder I could find, and distinctly remember carrying an especially tall one to our garage wall and placing it in full view of my grandmother's window. I took immense trouble to tilt it at an outrageously steep angle. Satisfied that she could not miss it, for several days in a row I stood right under it, only moving away when I saw her snap the curtains shut.

When my children were born, I stopped defying fate. With little ones, one never knows, I told myself. I firmly led them away from ladders and bought them blunt scissors. I worried unduly at night when I remembered having recounted their childish accomplishments to a friend whose jealousy I might inadvertently have excited. I repeatedly vowed not to vaunt their merits and kept scrutinising the girls for signs of strange illnesses every time I caught myself boasting, even mentally. I did not believe in the evil eye, of course, but then again, how could I be a hundred per cent sure that it did not exist?

Other changes came upon me with age. None of the black cat nonsense, though; we owned the blackest of toms for over fifteen years and I periodically tripped over him — and over his brothers and sisters as well, though none were black — and had nothing unusual to report. In other domains, however, I started noticing troubling coincidences. That friend who always happened to be visiting when one of the girls developed a sudden fever, the shirt I had to throw away because I lost my purse every time I wore it, friends having accidents on Fridays, though not necessarily the 13th... all these strange events started to add up. I still roared with laughter, telling the story of the man who stayed in bed on Friday the 13th to avoid any mishaps, then rolled out of bed and killed himself by falling on his chamber pot; but to be honest, I always had to suppress a shiver at the end of the story. By the same token, I never planned trips, excursions or even outings on that day. After all, there were not so many Fridays the 13th in a year, so why not make it our family's national day of rest?

Not long ago, I met an old friend whom I had not seen for ages. We talked for a while. "I remember you a few years ago, when your husband died," she said. "You were so down in the dumps. I didn't know how to help you. Look at you now, you are so well." I agreed that I was not doing too badly and we eventually parted company. A few hours later, I had a terrible car accident, barely escaping with my life. My maid came in the next day, took one look at me and said: "The evil eye, they gave you the evil eye." Rubbish, I told her, and sent her to the kitchen for some tea. She kept grumbling, suggesting that she buy incense and burn it around me to ward off evil. I told her not to dare, and informed her that educated people did not believe in hocus pocus. She kept shaking her head, muttering all the while, but left me alone.

A few days ago, I was watching a stupid film on TV, berating myself all the while; it is unlike me to waste precious time on such trash. After all, I told myself, it was my ankle, not my head, which had been damaged. My daughter was pounding away on the PC, finishing an urgent translation. "What are you watching?" she asked with a note of incredulity. Rising from her chair, she took a couple of steps towards the TV to have a look. At that very moment, the bookshelf unit above the desk at which she had been sitting seconds before literally detached itself from the wall and came crashing onto the chair. "I could have been killed," she gasped, when the din finally subsided. I spent the rest of the night shivering at the thought of what had been about to happen. In the morning the maid pensively observed the devastation, which my daughter and her husband had done their best to minimise. "I told you," she said jubilantly, "it is the evil eye." I suggested that she burn some incense.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Pigeons stuffed with *fereek*

Ingredients:

4 pigeons (large)
1 1/4 cup *fereek* (husked wheat)
1 cup hot water
1 whole onion
4 tbsp. butter ghee
1/4 cup milk
Salt + pepper + cardamom seeds + bay leaves

Method:

Wash the pigeons well and leave the upper part, from the neck to the chest, intact. Remove from the inside the thin layer of flesh which is the inner lining of the pigeon's throat. Put the pigeons in a strainer to drain the water completely. In the meantime, wash the *fereek* and strain it. In a cooking pan, put two tablespoonfuls of butter ghee to melt. Add the *fereek* and stir it in over high heat until it absorbs all the ghee. Add a substantial amount of salt and pepper and stir. Add the water and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to the minimum and stir. Cover and leave to cook over simmering ring for half an hour. Leave to cool to room temperature then start stuffing the pigeons with it. Start stuffing from the lower opening of the legs, forcing upwards with your thumb to fill the throat until you reach the neck opening. Continue stuffing until you stuff the lower part as well. Block with the giblets and fold the legs, forcing them into the little hole at the bottom. Tie a piece of thread around the neck to close its opening. Bring the wings to the back. Boil in water until cooked, the same way as chicken, using the onion and the spices. Roll the pigeons after removing them from their stock in some milk and fry in the remaining butter ghee until it turns golden brown. Serve hot with *kishk* or *molokhiya*.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Ding dong

Andrew Steele applies the correct pressure

The recently opened Taco Bell — the latest scrap of America to hit Mohandessin — is everything you would wish it to be. The decor is scrubbed and gleaming. The clever little speakers throb with disco classics. MTV flickers on the video monitors that adorn the wall, uniformed staff scurry around and clean things. The service is snappy and comes with a smile. It is the epitome of fast food heaven.

The interior architecture is imaginative enough, the space is split into three levels by a series of chrome staircases, light is supplied *au naturel* via a frosted glass dome. One can perch on a stool and eat at a counter, or lounge on a vinyl-covered bench with the Pepsi crowd and swap gossip.

But what of the food? More Tex than Mex, but none the worse for it; perhaps Taco Bell's greatest strength is that it's not just another hamburger joint — or is it? We decided to spend at least LE30, as my companion coveted a Batman and Robin plastic cup — this month's pick. This did not prove difficult as the menu is quite varied, indeed smacks of promise. There is a selection of nachos — always a treat — and we plumped for the chili cheese variety. They were crisp and non-greasy and came on a little paper platter, liberally doused with bright orange cheese and rather unappetising-looking mince. They did, however, taste really quite good in a plasticky sort of way, as did the chili cheese fries, which came similarly topped.

Be warned — Taco Bell is not the venue for a first date. Tacos, in case you are unaware, require one to apply just the right amount of pressure when holding them to keep them in your grip, but not so much as to make them crack and dispel their contents onto your lap. Or, heaven forfend, your date's lap. Being a seasoned food critic, I managed to avert this particular pitfall, but Karima managed to make a nasty splat on the table which I later put my elbow in. Once the art of taco eating has been mastered, however, Taco Bell is no bad place to get your taco kicks. The Taco Supreme was deliciously crisp, filled with the same "tastes much better than it looks" mince, sour cream and salad. The Cheese Quesadilla came in a cardboard folder and was rather good — a flat, soft taco full of melted cheese. And there we should have desisted, as our final savoury item — a bean burrito — was rather less pleasant. A distinctly *fuul*-like concoction wrapped in a soft taco, perked up with a dob or two of sour cream, it didn't taste bad — it just didn't seem like a nice thing to eat at the time. Perhaps we had over-ordered.

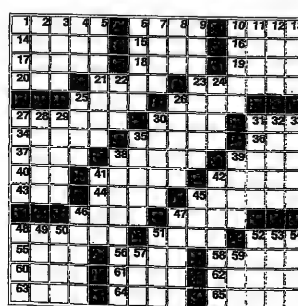
Pudding consisted of an Apple Empenade — a warm sponge slice stuffed with a smooth apple and cinnamon compote. This too was tasty, but we could not help but murmur how a dollop of whipped cream would perk it up no end. All of the above, along with a medium Pepsi and a Nescafé, came to a cheap and cheerful LE31. Quite a steal. The food, I'm sure, is of a uniformly high standard from Cairo to California and, to answer my earlier question, no, it's not quite a hamburger joint; it's more of a, well, a taco joint. If you're in the vicinity and you fancy a fast food fix, drop in — your greasy lunches will never be the same.

Taco Bell, Gamaat Al-Dowal Al-Arabiyya, Mohandessin.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



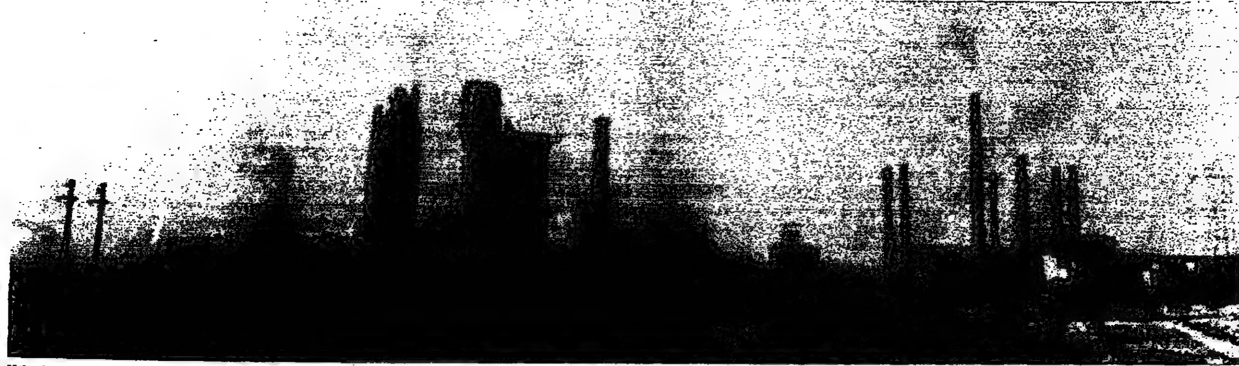
Across

1. Bone between knee and hip (5)
6. Fragments of diamond produced in cutting (4)
10. Interrogatory adverb (4)
14. Familiar with: alive to (5)
15. Always (4)
16. Excellent, 2 wds (4)
17. Rudder; constraints (5)
18. Man about town; Beau Brummel (4)
19. Stir up; shake (4)
20. Initials of married lady 93)
21. Component (4)
23. Specimen (6)
25. Sacred cow (4)
26. Composition (4)
27. Delay by traffic; robbery by use of threats, hyph. wds (6)
30. Misrepresenter (4)
31. Headdress (3)
34. Old womanish (5)
35. Peruvian raft (5)
36. Pub order (3)
37. Queue (4)
38. Knobs on a root (5)
39. Eject (4)
40. Heavy weight (3)
41. Cered (5)
42. Strain; sift (5)
43. Weather directions (3)
44. Presage (4)
45. Carrier (6)
46. Antlered ungulate (4)
47. Small drink of spirits (4)
48. Nuns' principal (6)
51. Dun-coloured; spiritless (4)
52. Pref. for "before" (5)
55. Grain like wheat or oats (4)
56. Bitter herb used as a strong laxative (4)
58. Shun; keep one's distance (5)
60. Castle defence (4)
61. Japanese syllabaries (4)
62. Cauterise (5)
63. Goals (4)
64. Saw (4)
65. Beelzebub (5)

DOWN

1. Homestead (4)
2. Jug with handle (4)
3. It follow "Avril" (3)
4. Amphora (3)
5. Remnants; extra (7)
6. University official with processional duties (5)
7. Egg cell of plants (4)
8. Debit side of account (3)
9. Entrenchment (8)
10. Reheats (5)
11. Circle (4)
12. The indigo plant (4)
13. Comb. form for "far" (4)
22. Apex (3)
24. Nimbus (4)
25. Not working (4)
26. Lubricated (5)
27. Throws anchor (5)
28. An allium (5)
29. Waterfalls (5)
30. Freighted (5)
31. Gambol (5)
32. In existence (5)
33. Dwindle (5)
35. A pugilist (5)
38. With the same patronymic (8)
39. Thailand once (4)
41. Griefs (4)
42. Marine fish (7)
45. Lady's underwear (3)
46. Depressions (5)
47. Fearfulness (5)
48. Peak of perfection (4)
49. Advantage (4)
50. Carpenter's need (4)
51. Finished (4)
52. South African ferry boat (4)
53. Capital of Latvia (4)
54. Paradise (4)
57. Set down (3)
59. Through (3)

Last week's solution



If the threat of an environmental cataclysm cannot make the worst offenders cut down on pollution, can sound business logic succeed? Many small industrialists need a helping hand if they are to help clean up *photo: Ayman Ibrahim*

It even makes business sense

This week, Environment Law No. 4 enters into full force. Among the clauses are heavy fines for industrialists unwilling, or unable, to apply environmentally-friendly measures. How seriously will the law be implemented? Profit, not penalties, seems to determine the culprits' attitude. Sherine Nasr investigates

Now that the three-year grace period of Environment Law No. 4 has come to an end, many environmental experts are wondering whether or not the existing 26,000 industrial establishments in Egypt are ready (or willing) to abide by it. More important is whether the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs will be able to strictly implement the law and compel these establishments to follow it. "This is perhaps the greatest challenge set before the ministry. It is not simply the task of this year, but of years to come," says Mohamed El-Guindi, one of the main architects of the law.

According to the most recent studies conducted by the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), the industrial sector in Egypt is responsible for the greatest amount of air, water and land pollution. "We cannot afford any more violations of the environment in Egypt," says Nadia Makram Ebeid, minister of state for environmental affairs. "Confronting deteriorating environmental conditions has become an urgent necessity," she added.

Such is the main purpose behind the issuing of the law. But as the grace period approached its end late last month, only 32 factories had already adjusted their status to meet the criteria set by the law. The majority were in the process — or had not even started.

"We are dealing with 26,000 industrial establishments all over the country. Will the ministry be able to compel each of these factories to abide by the law all by itself?" inquires Tarek Genina, head of the Technical Cooperation Office for the Environment.

In an attempt to accelerate the process of implementation, the minister has conducted a number of surprise tours to see for herself the measures taken by these factories to reduce the volume of industrial wastes and other pollutants. Two weeks before the full implementation of the law, Ebeid visited the Delta Factory for Steel in the industrial zone of Shubra Al-Kheima, north of Cairo. Established in 1947, the factory has been using the same equipment ever since. The factory produces 40,000 cubic metres of dust every hour and 36,000 cubic metres of untreated industrial waste-water every day, according to Magdi Allam, head of the Cairo and Fayoum branches at the EEAA.

In fact, the latest statistics published by the National Scientific Research Centre are more than alarming. Industrial operations produce 3-5 million tons of solid waste every year. "There are more than 1,000 factories which dump about 500,000 cubic metres of industrial waste into the Nile," says Allam. "Moreover, industrial operations are responsible for polluting the air with carbon dioxide, lead and heavy metals, which are most detrimental to human health," he adds.

Ibrahim Abdel-Gelil, executive director of the EEAA, stresses that the law is a means, not an end. "Applying the law is not our main target. Bettering the environmental conditions in Egypt is," he explains. Abdel-Gelil indicates that, so far, three and a half billion pounds have been spent by the industrial sector to accommodate environmentally-friendly strategies.

Environment Law No. 4 has identified the amount of pollutants which may be released safely into the air, water and ground inside and outside each industrial establishment. "The EEAA has set up a surveillance system to monitor emissions, solid and liquid wastes. A number of laboratories have been set up to help in the process," said Genina.

Penalties are determined according to the violation. Surplus gas emissions cost LE20,000 to LE40,000 in fines. The penalty for discharging untreated industrial waste into the Nile is LE20,000. "The causes of pollution must be eliminated at the offender's expense," says El-Guindi. "With repeated violations, the offender is subject to three years in prison," he elaborates.

Yet the threat of penalties seems to have had little impact on the industrialists. The grace period is over and only five per cent of the 26,000 industrial establishments either have, or are in the process of, abiding by the law. One thousand factories, believed to be responsible for a staggering 70 per cent of industrial pollution, have taken no steps whatsoever towards compliance. "The ministry is working to develop a clear vision of the situation in each of these factories, most of which are inclined to ask for another two-year grace period, which can only be granted by the prime minister upon our recommendation," explains Abdel-Gelil.

But is the ministry capable of studying each individual case? And how much more damage can the environment bear? The answers to these questions do not exactly appeal to environmental experts.

Cement, metal, petrochemicals and textile industries are considered among the most polluting. Yet many believe that the ministry lacks leverage to pressure these large industries, simply because they constitute the backbone of the national economy. No one believes that such establishments will be shut, or their licences withdrawn. "But economic visibility is not proportional to the detrimental impact of malpractice," argues El-Guindi.

Apart from big industries, small-scale, informal workshops contribute a considerable amount of pollution. Among these are metal smelters, brick furnaces and metal, leather and marble workshops. "They hardly apply any environmental safety measures. They use mazout, one of the most polluting types of fuel and the outcome is, of course, disastrous," says Allam.

In an attempt to minimise the hazards facing urban dwellers, the Ministry of Environment recently assisted 23 of these small workshops, south of Cairo, in a conversion to natural gas. "Natural gas is an environmentally-friendly type of energy. This is only a short-term solution, however. In the long run, these workshops will be transferred outside residential areas," promises Abdel-Gelil.

There are still about 700 lead smelters located inside residential areas in Cairo. These release about 1,100 tons of lead every year.

Of all cities, Cairo and Alexandria have the most factories, and therefore generate the most pollution. "The levels of lead in Cairo's air, for example, are about three times higher than recommended levels," explains Allam.

The damage done to entire residential areas by uncontrolled industrialisation is hard to estimate. Nevertheless, a note of hope emerges to underline a simple yet essential fact: industrialists think in terms of money. The fact is that all environmentally-friendly measures are, in the long run, cost-effective. "Applying environmentally-friendly technology cuts down on raw materials, reduce energy consumption and minimises waste," says Hamdi Seddiq, head of the environmental protection department at a major cement company. "Moreover, industrialists are becoming more aware of the fact that they will not be able to manage their business in an open market unless they provide an environmentally-friendly product," he adds.

Although measures to protect the environment, such as the filters installed to cut down cement dust emissions, can be quite costly, "the positive effects of sound policies can hardly be ignored," Seddiq asserts.

One pharmaceuticals corporation which took the plunge faced a difficult choice: to start a new production line or to apply pollution prevention techniques. "We chose to adopt an environmentally-friendly strategy and we are certain that the costs will be recouped in under three years," the general manager says.

The company used to release 300 tons of organic solvents per year into the atmosphere, as well as massive quantities of gypsum dust generated during the manufacturing process. It then applied to a bank which extended a low-interest, long-term loan of LE2.5m. "The technique prevented the release of almost 85 per cent of the organic solvents into the atmosphere. As a result, it saved the company 50 per cent of the solvent's overall cost," he explains.

By implementing an environmentally-friendly strategy, the company qualified for ISO 9002. "Our image was boosted in the international market and we have increased our export to Europe."

Hope beyond the smog

The people with the highest hopes pinned to the implementation of the Environment Law are probably the inhabitants of the most polluted areas. Fatemah Farag reports from the village of Kafr Al-Elw

Coming into the Maasara area on the road to Helwan, you can feel the air thicken with white dust. Dead trees line the road and, if you take the metro, the only sights from there on will be the hulking shapes of the smoke-spouting factories. Kafr Al-Elw is a village situated right beneath the Portland Cement Factory and from anywhere you stand in the village you can get a panoramic view of the yellow mass of chimneys. On the other side, the village is bordered by a canal filled with pollutants from nearby textile, cardboard and metal works factories, as well as piles of rotting garbage.

The Kafr is a painful microcosm of the problems created by pollution in general, and cement pollution in particular. The inhabitants are more than aware of the fact. "Our children are sick. They are born with respiratory diseases. Why? Because of the pollution, of course," says Mohamed Farghali, a worker at the Portland factory.

A year ago, the Social Research Centre (SRC) of the American University in Cairo, in cooperation with the Canadian International Development Research Centre, carried out a study to determine what people think about their environment and pollution issues. "Everyone says the problem is that people are not 'aware', but through our study of four popular areas we discovered that the problem is very clear in people's minds," explains Soheir Mehana, senior researcher at the SRC.

But then, why wouldn't it be? The people of Kafr Al-Elw have had to adapt their daily lives to the white cloud. Sheets of plastic are pinned to shutters, video-cassette recorders and tape players are covered in cellophane, and laundry hung out to dry is covered in plastic. According to a 1994 USAID Report on Environmental Health Risks in Cairo, concentrations of particulate matter in Cairo's air exceed health-based standards between five and tenfold and are higher than in any of the world's largest cities. In fact, according to the report, eliminating non-natural pollutants of this type would avoid 3,000-16,000 deaths and 90-270 million person-days of restricted activity (e.g., hospitalisation). For the inhabitants of Kafr Al-Elw, these statistics are made flesh in lung and skin diseases.

Mehana sees hope in the new law. "What I am seeing is factories doing their best to get the filters in — there is a dialogue." But in Kafr Al-Elw, people wonder. "Several filters have been put into the chimneys and when they are working we don't get any dust," explains Mohamed, who works at the factory and would not give his full name. Trapped between pollution and unemployment, Mohamed goes on to complain, however, that "the filters decrease production and constantly get clogged with dust, which means they need to be cleaned. This results in a temporary shut-down of production and is very costly. The end result is that the filters are not used or left broken down for some time."

Mehana concurs that "management tells workers that if they don't produce enough then there will be no bonuses... this discourages workers from being active in confronting pollution problems. We even had a worker who told us that he was harassed directly by his manager because he complained."

Nicholas Hopkins, professor of sociology at AUC, was directly involved in the project. He points out that "everything done at the grassroots level deals with the issue as a problem of education, and this is based on the assumption that ordinary people are the source of pollution. However, this is not true when looking at a cement factory. So if there is going to be an effective strategy, then it should be to rally people against the factory and that is not happening." He adds that there is a conspicuous absence of non-governmental organisations. "NGOs visible on the national level do not as a rule reach into neighbourhoods... They seem to operate on a different level."

The people of Kafr Al-Elw have tried everything they can think of to help solve the pollution problem. "They have called the press and TV. They have even started to sue the factory," explains Mehana.

The SRC study points out that 64.9 per cent of people interviewed in Kafr Al-Elw said that the government has not done anything to protect or clean up the environment. "We go to the political parties for help and they only give us promises during elections. We try to get help from the media, nobody cares. We go to the local council and they do nothing... look at the garbage filling our canal and then of course the factory is even bigger than the government," says Saadiya Ali.

Hopkins notes, "People have not given up on the system. They still try to find solutions, hoping that the right person will pick up their cause. Their life is a struggle between cynicism and hope."

Apart from the strict implementation of the law, what can be done? The answer to this question is tied to whether pollution is seen as a strictly technological and legislative problem or as a social problem which reflects contradictory interests. Hopkins suggests that "the elites — decision-makers — have to be made aware this is a serious problem. The dynamic for change comes from there."

Both researchers acquiesce that, especially during the phase of privatisation, the need for these factories to be and remain profitable puts a strain on how environmentally-friendly they will become. Both agree, however, that privatisation could work in favour of a better environment policy for industry. "Once the factory is privatised, then people can take action against it without actually being in a position of confronting the government; in fact, the government also will be hounding the factory to get in shape," claims Mehana. As Hopkins concludes, "the issue is how to turn these ageing factories into modern, clean structures."

Back at the Kafr, the dynamics of the law, privatisation and other complex issues remain pretty much beyond the people, struggling to keep their heads above the dust.



Clean water, clean air? Lack of awareness is not the problem *photo: Adel Ahmed*

The dukes of hazard

The Centre for Environmental Hazard Mitigation (CEHM) was inaugurated at Cairo University last week. Planners hope it will help develop Egypt's natural resources and preserve its environment. Zeinab Abul-Gheit reports

The Centre for Environmental Hazard Mitigation (CEHM) was jointly established by Cairo University, Argonne National Laboratory and Washington University, and received LE10 million from the US Department of Agriculture through the Egyptian Ministry of International Cooperation. The past two years' achievements can be reviewed on the Centre's web site. Projects include the assessment of Delta shoreline erosion; monitoring urbanisation in the Nile Delta; the analysis of Sheikh Zayed city; the evaluation of drinking water quality in Cairo, Tanta and the surroundings; geophysical studies of New Fayoum City; and the evaluation of soil and groundwater resources in Wadi Tarfa and the Eastern Desert.

Mahmoud El-Sherif, minister of rural development, inaugurated the Centre. Farouk Ismail, president of Cairo University, professor Mohamed Sultan, the principal US investigator, and Yehia Abdel-Hadi, CEHM director, addressed the conference. University presidents and deans, as well as scientists from various research institutions, attended.

"The Centre could play a major role in developing rural areas and in raising the standard of living," said El-Sherif. Landsat images and the updated Geographical Information System are among the sophisticated equipment from which the Centre now benefits. Egyptian scientists trained at the Centre and in the US are now set to participate in solving pressing national problems such as urban encroachment on agriculture lands, pollution of surface and underground water and the lack of proper planning in rural areas. "Through cooperation with the Rural Development Programme (Shurouq), villages can be turned into poles of attraction rather than points of repulsion," El-Sherif explained.

Farouk Ismail pointed out that the Centre is the first of its kind in the Middle East. It will assume a major responsibility in fighting environmental challenges in rural and urban areas, and thus participate in the drive toward sustainable development. Besides raising educational standards for young scientists, Ismail added that the Centre will play an active role in the planning and implementation of large-scale national projects.

Mohamed Sultan added a more personal note: "When I look at the centre now in its completed form, I feel totally satisfied that the long hours of hard work I devoted to the design and implementation of this project are trivial compared to the result," Sultan added.

Despite a variety of obstacles, the Centre has been completed one and a half years ahead of schedule. Yet it was not idle even during the construction phase. Studies conducted over the past three years have yielded results that are being used to raise living standards nationwide. Sultan expressed pride that the Centre is now recognised as a leading environmental facility in Egypt; it has even been selected to maintain and operate Egypt's first air quality monitoring network. The Environmental Affairs Agency has selected the CEHM to run 27 of its 40 air quality stations.

Christopher Reilly, director of the Environmental Research Division at Argonne National Laboratory, noted that the CEHM is now connected with the outside world through the Internet and can thus obtain the most updated technology easily. On the other hand, Reilly said that the Egyptian ministries can make things easier for the Centre, and its collaborators from the US, by promoting and enforcing sound environmental measures.

Future projects, according to CEHM Director Yehia Abdel-Hadi, include the charting of seismic risk maps for the urban areas of the Southern Valley, the Red Sea coasts, the Gulf of Aqaba, Suez and Cairo. These maps will allow architects, engineers and urban planners to take local conditions (e.g. soil characteristics) into consideration, and thus to secure new and old edifices in case of medium-magnitude earthquakes.

Omayma Abdel-Latif went to the deep Egyptian south while lower down the Nile Valley, **Nevine El-Aref** went to Abuseer, Giza and Alexandria — a journey of discovery and celebration extending from 12,000-year-old settlements, west of Abu Simbel to the almost 'modern' Alexandria of Anthony and Cleopatra

Al-Ahram Weeky was witness to history unfolding as the first Ancient Egyptian tomb to be discovered intact since 1922 was ceremoniously opened this week. But was the mummified priest, lying undisturbed for over two millennia, sleeping with the enemy?





Tense moments surround the opening of the sealed tomb of a high priest (left) to reveal an anthropoid coffin (right)

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

The fifth opening

The official opening of the tomb of Iufaa, lector priest and controller of the palace during the 26th dynasty, took place this week. As the first intact tomb to be opened since the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb 76 years ago, excitement was at a fever pitch.

Attendants of the opening ceremony carefully descended a wooden ladder into a huge shaft, 13 metres square and plunging to a depth of some 28 metres below the desert floor. In front of the door lay a small sturdy tomb of large white limestone blocks. There was total silence, broken only by the sound of the tomb opening. No grave-robber, no tomb violator had been there before. An enormous white limestone sarcophagus lay at the centre, intact.

Around its base, and in the narrow aperture between the sarcophagus and the tomb walls, lay all the burial equipment interred with the deceased on the day of his death: a full set of 408 faience *ushabtis* (statuettes to serve the deceased in his afterlife) canopic jars, with lids shaped like human heads, carrying his vital remains, wooden furniture, stone vessels of various sizes and a considerable quantity of pottery, much of it of foreign import.

"The pottery will provide one of the clues to the chronology of the tomb," said Miroslav Verner, head of the Czech mission at Abuseer, located between Giza and Saqqara.

The opening of the sarcophagus generated enormous excitement as journalists and photographers crowded about Farouk Hosni, the minister of culture, and his entourage in the confined space, each trying to get shots as the limestone lid of the 20-ton sarcophagus was lifted by jacks. It was no easy task, and had to be carried out with extreme caution. Once it was raised sufficiently, the tomb was first supported by inserting wooden wedges and then blocks of wood along its edges. Then massive wooden beams were used to support the weight of the lid which was subsequently tilted to the north and laid on wooden scaffolding that had been prepared in advance.

At this stage a huge anthropoid coffin was revealed, adorned with coloured hieroglyphic texts. Its lid was partially lifted and there, lying in the recess, beneath a scattering of earth, lay an inner wooden coffin. Unfortunately it had deteriorated badly, having suffered from humidity. Nevertheless, it had preserved the remains of a mummy which will be removed and taken to a scientific research centre to be x-rayed and studied.

"It is an important discovery," said Hosni, adding that the tomb had not been entered since burial rites ended some 25 centuries ago. "Its value is further enhanced by the fact that it has been more than 50 years since a similar intact tomb of this type has been discovered," Hosni said.

There are differing opinions about how old the tomb is. Egyptologist Zahi Hawass, director general of Giza Plateau, believes it dates back to the time of King Amasis of the 26th dynasty when the royal family was buried in Sais in the Delta. "But the fact that this man, with 10 others, was buried in Abuseer suggests they may have been traitors who cooperated with the Persians," Hawass said.

He backed his view by pointing out that two years ago the Czech team discovered a tomb, next to Iufaa's, of a man called Udjahorresnet whose statue, now in the Vatican, is described as an official of the Persian King Cambysis.

On the other hand, Gaballa Ali Gaballa, general secretary of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, says that Abuseer is a part of Giza necropolis, located near Memphis. The city was the ancient Egyptian capital from the Old Kingdom right through to the New. "So we might have tombs at Abuseer that date from the first dynasty through to the 30th," Gaballa said.

It was difficult, because of the number of people in the tomb, to get a view of the inscribed walls. They are covered with hieroglyphs of exquisite craftsmanship: spells and invocations of the ancient Pyramid Texts, the oldest of the mortuary literature in Egypt that had earlier been used only for the tombs of Old Kingdom rulers. There were also extracts from later religious texts, including the Book of the Dead, which Gaballa suggests, was in the late period of Egyptian history "when there was a revival of the spirit of the Old Kingdom."

Gaballa added that the Pyramid texts were not inscribed in tombs after the 18th dynasty. "This new discovery clearly indicates a return to the traditional spirit of the Old Kingdom," he said, "not by royalty alone but also among ordinary people and high-ranking officials."

The tomb was originally discovered in 1996 by a Czech team in collaboration with the SCA. Hawass said, "There was a long delay in the opening due to the extremely poor condition of the tomb walls." The ceiling also threatened to collapse. Moreover, the shaft and its two small side-shafts are cut from *tafla* , the hard unstable clay that lies under the desert sand. It was also necessary, as a first step, to build a strong protective roof for the tomb below. A protective casing for the whole tomb has now been put in place. A gable roof made of reinforced concrete has been built to protect the tomb from damage coming from above.

Hawass said the opening of the sarcophagus is the fifth in the history of archaeology. "The first was that of Tutankhamun in Luxor, the second belonged to Queen Hetep-Heres at Giza, the third was Sekhemhet at Saqqara (found empty), the fourth the royal tombs of the kings of the 22nd dynasty at Tanis, and now this."

A compact wooden staircase has been built in the southern shaft for access to the tomb, while the smaller, western side shaft has been opened to provide proper ventilation. "This will help protect the tomb from future deterioration caused by humidity," said Verner, who explained that the reliefs were first covered with foam, then with plywood sheets for protection during the opening. The spaces between the walls and the sarcophagus were filled with sand so that no damage could be done to the precious reliefs.

With the tomb thus protected, work can commence on recording the wall inscriptions as well as conducting engineering work necessary prior to the complete opening of the wooden sarcophagus.

Verner said once the tomb has been fully restored, it will be open to the public as one of the main attractions of Abuseer, along with the beautiful mastaba of Ptah Shepses, the pyramid complex of the 5th dynasty King Sahure and the unfinished pyramid of Neferefre which was excavated a month ago.

"The site will be officially opened to the public in May," he said.

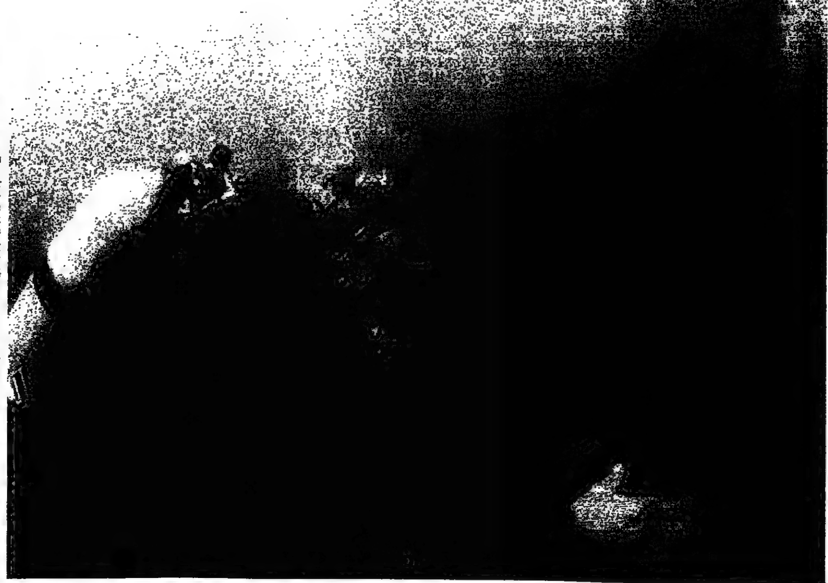
Raising Alexandria

A Ptolemaic city discovered off Alexandria's eastern harbour may be older than previously thought

In the eastern harbour of Alexandria, five kilometres from the beach and four to six metres underwater, the Timoniom, a palace 150 by 50 metres and built on an artificial rock in the waters of the Mediterranean has been found.

Ibrahim Darwish, director of the Underwater Archaeology Department (UAD) said that divers had also found a statue of a lady holding a child which may represent the goddess Isis and her son Horus.

During the archaeological season which ended in December 1997, the European Institute of Marine Archaeology (EIA), in collaboration with UAD and the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), identified the site of the palace where Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt and Caesar Marcus Antonius courted one another for three years, from 32 BC to 30 BC, before they committed suicide. Antonius killed himself after being defeated in the Battle of Actium while Cleopatra chose to be bitten by an asp rather than be subjected to Roman rule.



Face to face with a sphinx from Cleopatra's submerged royal palace offshore Alexandria

photo: F. Osada

Other ruins discovered offshore include Anti-Rhodes Island, the royal quarter of Cleopatra, and the Portus Magnus, the main harbour used by the Ptolemies between 304 and 305 BC, in addition to miscellaneous objects.

Three sphinxes are among the treasures identified in their watery environment. They were found standing on a single base, probably at the city's gates. A bust of a Roman commander was also found. "It may be the head of Antonius because it has the same facial characteristics as the one exhibited in the Egyptian museum," suggested Darwish. "A collection of granite pillars, dating back to the 26th Dynasty, was also discovered as well as stone blocks, a royal crown and remains of the city's pavement."

The new finds provide evidence suggesting that some of the buildings on the submerged island may be "much older than Alexandria, the city founded by Alexander the Great," said an official at the SCA. He said a specimen collected from the eastern tip of the submerged island had been scientifically analysed, determining that the objects date back to between the 5th and 7th centuries BC. Analysis also showed that the mortar used in the central part of the island dates to the first century AD. "The red granite pillars and other objects substantiate these tentative results," the official said.

"The find is quite revolutionary," said Aziza Said, professor of Graeco-Roman archaeology at Alexandria University. "Archaeologists have long believed that the royal quarters lay beneath the modern constructions in central Alexandria," she explained. "But now, after these important and exciting steps in the work of underwater archaeology, vast Graeco-Roman ruins are coming to light."

According to Said, the survey is important not only because it reveals a great deal about the still obscure lives of the Ptolomies but also because it opens doors for many more discoveries, and could conceivably lead archaeologists to pinpointing the site of the tomb of Cleopatra. "I believe that it may not be far from the site of the Timoniom," Sa'id said.

Ahmed Abdel-Fattah, director general of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, said that during the mission's underwater search in 1997, the wreckage of a British military aircraft, dating back to World War II, was found. "It is the second to be found in the Alexandria region," said Abdel-Fattah, adding that the first was found in 1934 by Prince Omar Tousson.

André Bernar, professor of Graeco-Roman history at the Sorbonne, said that 16 reliefs lying in the water had been copied, using silicon, in an attempt to study them. The reliefs date back to Emperor Caracalla. They indicate that Alexandria was the main administrative quarter of the royal family during this period.

Enthusiasm about the discoveries is running high. The mission is headed by Franc Gaudieu, the underwater Egyptologist who started his work in 1992 by making a full survey of Alexandria's eastern harbour, starting from El-Shatbi and extending to Silsilla. In 1994 and 1995 Gaudieu's team included 12 members of the French mission and four Egyptian archaeologists who continued the survey and drew up a map of the archaeological areas. "The map is similar to one drawn up by Strabo, the Greek historian, who visited Egypt in 25 BC," said Darwish. "In October 1996 the mission continued its work and discovered 36 items which strongly suggested that the royal quarters were not very far. We have left all the objects *in situ* for the time being in the hope of eventually building an underwater museum in Alexandria," Darwish added.

When New Year was 21 June

Archaeologists digging in the southwest corner of Egypt have come across the scattered remains of people who just may be the distant ancestors of the pharaohs

Fred Wendorf and Gaballa Gaballa look at surface evidence of what may be the oldest human settlement in the world comprising villages scattered over a 38 square kilometre area, while diggers reveal one of the circular walls *Photo: Khaled El-Fiqi*

In 1962, American anthropologist Fred Wendorf came to Egypt on a mission to help rescue prehistoric remains near the Aswan reservoir. The job was to have been completed within two years, but 36 years later Wendorf is still here, unveiling to the world some of the rarest and earliest sites unearthed in Egypt.

"The enormous quantity of material discovered before the [High Dam] reservoir flooded the area was extremely interesting as it recorded some unknown aspects and changes of human society over the period from about 25,000 BC up to the beginning of the complex society in Ancient Egypt," Wendorf told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

To Wendorf and his peers, everything they found at first was unique because "no one had seen such intact sites in Egypt before." But after years of study, he and his team began to "find patterns in this uniqueness."

One of the oldest finds, and one which received a great deal of attention, was when Wendorf came across the earliest signs of organised warfare in a graveyard in Jebel Sahaba near Wadi Halfa. "More than 44 men, women and children were buried. They showed signs of having died violently, not of natural causes," Wendorf said. The grave was dated to around 14,000 years ago, much earlier than had been thought for the region. The corpses had none of the physical characteristics of indigenous Egyptians. "They were tall, heavily muscled people with strong physiques. They had some resemblance to the population of the Maghreb," Wendorf said.

New discoveries at a site some 100 kilometres west of Ramses II's temple at Abu Simbel, at Nabta Playa, have yielded dozens of sites spanning the Paleolithic periods from 10,000 BC to about 4,500 BC. There is strong evidence that this was the largest basin in the southeastern region of the Sahara.

"It was a grass-covered and Savannah-like plain, shaded by drought-resistant trees such as acacias, a sort of oasis where one of the earliest human settlements in the world took root," was how Wendorf described it. "It was richer than the surrounding areas because it had water which was the key to all human settlement in the Sahara."

The importance of the site for world heritage lies not only in the wealth of anthropological material revealed, but also because it came to be known as "a regional ceremonial centre where people gathered from many different areas to perform rituals."

Among the recent discoveries are 75 oval houses built in alignment and made of large stones. Also unearthed was what is believed to be a miniature version of Stonehenge. R. Schild, co-director of the site, says it is the oldest calendar ever found. But how did it work?

"Four pairs of slabs in the circle are longer and set closer together than the others. These are called gates. Two pairs on opposite sides of the circle are aligned exactly north-south while the other two are aligned at 70 degrees northeast. This direction points to the position of the sun on 21 June. That is the beginning of summer, and the beginning of the rainy season in this belt of Africa," Schild said.

The rain was a cause for celebration. Not far from the calendar circle, Wendorf unearthed a place where the entire population was believed to have gathered for annual festivities. Evidence lay in a mass of refuse two metres deep and more cattle bones than anywhere else in the Sahara. "It was a time for cattle slaughter, a rare and probably religiously-charged event, both for consumption and sacrificial burial, perhaps as offerings to the gods who brought the rain," Wendorf said.

During this season's excavations, the team came across 30 megalithic structures made of huge stones, each weighing two-and-a-half tons. More intriguing still was an impressive piece of stonework which, according to Wendorf, "may well mark the beginning of the early Egyptian fascination with working with large stone, and could possibly be the oldest sculpture in Egypt."

Many of those visiting the site this week hailed the discovery as impressive and rare, saying that it will shed light on one of the lesser-known eras in the history of Egyptian civilisation. The monuments discovered in the area provide the earliest evidence of the emergence of leaders who commanded the building of large-scale public architecture.

"Construction of these megalithic structures requires a degree of skill, organisation and commitment previously unknown at such an early date," said Renee Friedman, an Egyptologist who has published a book on Egypt's latest discoveries due out this month. Friedman is also supervising a TV series on the discoveries at Nabta Playa to be televised on America's Discovery Channel and on Welsh TV. Friedman said that for the past few months Egypt has been "very ill-served in the Western media" and that the book was to correct common misconceptions, among which is that "little is left to be discovered." As Friedman says, nothing could be farther from the truth. The discoveries at Nabta Playa serve to prove her point.

Friedman said that the remarkable early advances in technology and society, as revealed in the recent discoveries in the area, seemed ironically to correspond with the beginning of the end of the desert dwellers.

"Slowly, the rainfall diminished and finally, around 6,000 years ago, it ceased entirely. The Sahara became the barren waste it is today," Friedman said.

What happened next remains unclear. One theory is that when the last ruler of the Nabta Playa region decided to abandon the desert and lead his organised band eastward to the life-giving waters of the Nile, they brought with them many of those features that would soon distinguish Egypt from anywhere else on earth.



The queens, finally

Extensive restoration work continues throughout the Giza Plateau, but, for the moment, visitors will have much more to add to their itinerary, not least the pyramids of the queens

For the first time, three small pyramids belonging to Ancient Egyptian queens, along with numerous tombs of noblemen which had never been opened before, have now been declared officially open to the public.

The queens' pyramids are those of Khufu's mother Hetep-Heres — whose beautiful funerary equipment is one of the highlights of the Egyptian Museum — along with two of his wives, Merit-It-Es and Henutsen. The noblemen's tombs, east of Khufu's Great Pyramid, belong to high-ranking officials who were buried in two separate areas, one west of the Great Pyramid where four tombs are located, and the other south of the causeway of Khafra's Pyramid.

The opening of the tombs came following extensive restoration. "Although these tombs may be poor in decoration, they are rich in architectural features," said Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni. "They have impressive facades, more like temples than tombs, and some have large chambers with rock-hewn pillars." Hosni said.

Some of the tombs were originally discovered in the 1930s by Egyptian Egyptologist Selim Hassan, but had never been properly cleared or opened to the public. They belonged to officials that bore such titles as lector priest and Overseer of the Divine Places of the Great Palace. The tomb of Iwn-Min belonged to the eldest son of Menkaure, builder of the Third Pyramid, who held the position of vizier and judge. "These have now been cleaned, the monuments restored, lighting installed, inscriptions conserved and tomb walls reinforced," said Zahi Hawass, director of the Giza Plateau.

Four of the tombs were discovered early in the 20th century by George Reisner. They were found in very poor condition. They belonged to a vizier who was also chief justice and overseer of all the king's work; a royal scribe and overseer of the granary; a high priest; and a vizier and royal architect. All were members of the same family.

"Missing pillars had to be added to these tombs, ceilings were built for protection, and walls appropriately restored," said Hawass, adding that the floors are now protected by wood.

Referring to the four tombs, Gaballa Gaballa, director-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said: "They have unique features. It is rare to find an entrance with a portico for officials, as is the case here."

As for the queens' pyramids, "these needed both internal and external restoration," said Hawass. "Masonry had fallen on the outside, which we replaced in their original position. Inside, where the walls had deteriorated, black spots had to be cleaned."



The limestone sarcophagus of Debehen's Tomb, one of the new tombs recently opened to the public *Photo: Sherif Sonbol*

Hawass said it was the first time these pyramids, belonging to royal consorts, had been open to the public.

But queens and high-ranking noblemen notwithstanding, it is always a king's pyramid which draws the most interest, and so the focus of attention was mainly on the so-called Third Pyramid, the smallest of the three on the Giza Plateau, belonging to Menkaure, which has officially opened after a year's restoration.

"This might be the smallest of the three kings' pyramids at Giza, but it is elegant, and complementary to the other two," said Hawass. "The lower outer courses of the pyramid, in granite, have been replaced, the walls inside chemically cleaned, and the fragile parts restored with mortar."

"Graffiti in the pyramid written at the time has been cleaned and protected. Also, appropriate ventilation has been installed and air circulation will be renewed every two hours," said Gaballa.

In order to guide people round the Giza Plateau and to point out where the various tombs are, routes will be marked with appropriate signs and directions.

In order to decrease the pressure on certain monuments, Hawass outlined that the three great pyramids will be opened in rotation, "never all at one time," he said.

The Pyramid Plateau project is now in its 10th year, and although a great deal remains to be done, improvements to date are impressive. Work still underway includes construction of a stone wall separating the village of Nezlet El-Simman from the plateau. In April, the present entrance to the plateau will be closed in order to protect the monuments from further harm caused by urban development. The public will have access via the Fayoum Road.

Edited by **Jill Kamil**

The other side of Toshka

Archaeologists and geologists are urging the government to take cultural preservation into consideration as it moves ahead with the New Valley development project

"We are on the verge of a major crisis," Fekri Hassan, head of the Archaeology Institute at the University College of London [UCL] told a group of archaeologists and geologists attending the first international forum on the "archaeology of Toshka." The Toshka Canal is designed to develop the New Valley which extends through the Western Desert's Kharga, Dakhla and Farafra oases, each with historically important zones.

The crisis Hassan was referring to would result from rerouting the Toshka Canal in order to bypass a 160-metre-high plateau — which is being seriously considered — thus affecting countless prehistoric sites.

This is not the only challenge scholars are facing. Development schemes are going ahead at such a fast pace in the Toshka area that geologists attending the forum are concerned about the desert environment. "The desert habitat is very fragile. It could be destroyed in no time if we flung open the door for tourist investment in the area," Hassan warned.

Yet, already numerous tourist projects have been planned for the area. Tarek Wafik, an urban development expert, said there has been a rush to push such projects forward. "Nine sites north and south of Abu Simbel have already been designated and possible attraction sites have been surveyed and assigned," Wafik explained. Applications by investors have been already submitted, he added.

As for the Toshka area, Wafik said a preliminary plan for tourism development has been laid out. What Wafik and other urban development experts seek to accomplish is to make tourists stay longer. This, according to Wafik, will be achieved "through a network of cultural attractions that will be combined with the amenities of recreational tourism." The attractions include, of course, the archaeological sites of the area which will be placed high on the tourist agenda, a fact that has sent the alarm bells ringing in archaeology circles.

The themes that dominated the discussions at the forum were the importance of the archaeological sites in the Toshka area, and concern over rapid tourism development and investment there.

Realising that once the investment wheel starts turning, it will be difficult to put on the brakes, archaeologists have urged that any urban development plan "has to be concerned with long-term preservation of cultural sites."

The Supreme Council of Antiquities secretary-general, Gaballa A. Gaballa, said the council is currently preparing a comprehensive plan for the documentation, protection, conservation, prospecting and excavation of desert archaeological sites.

Gaballa told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that one step towards achieving this would be to declare Nabta Playa and its environs and the Khafre (Chephren) quarries 40 kilometres west of the Toshka spillway, a national protectorate. Gaballa said that a request is to be submitted to UNESCO to have the Toshka archaeological sites placed on the World Heritage List in order to protect the areas from any urban encroachment likely to result from the development rush in the area.

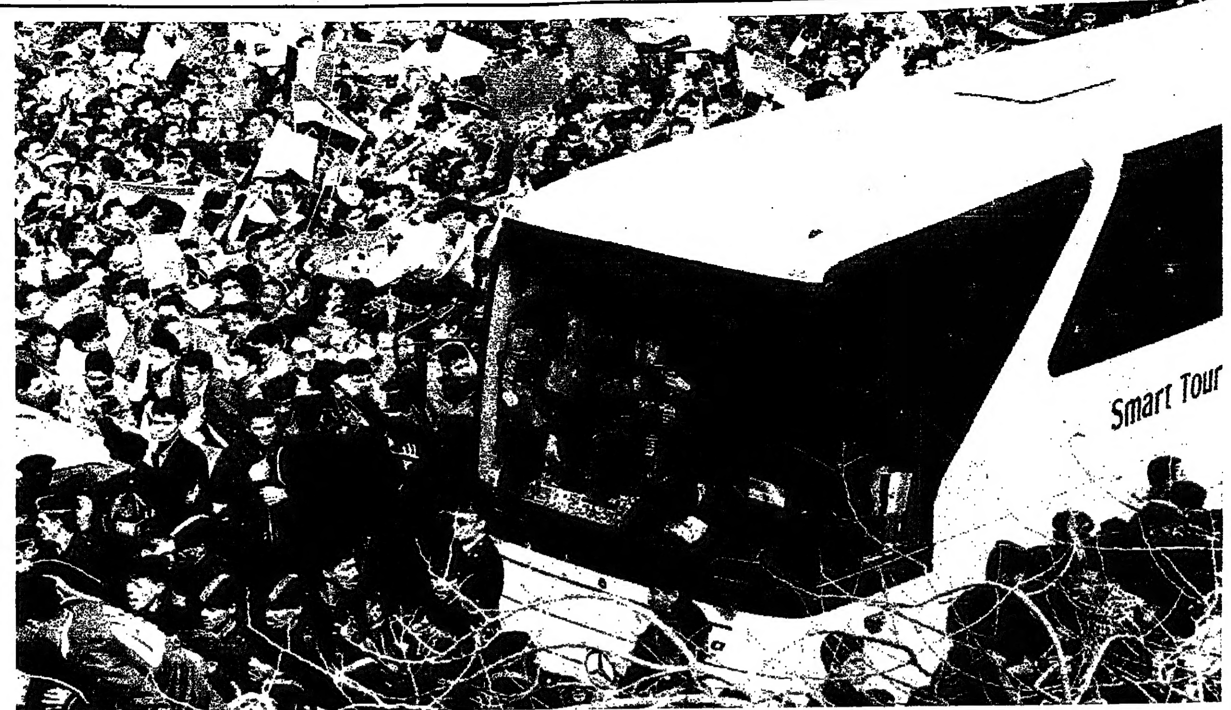
Prof. Fred Wendorf, head of an excavation team in the Toshka region, urged that steps be taken "before the project reaches the point where they [Toshka Canal planners] will have to make the left turn to avoid the 160-metre plateau.

"This would be the easiest turn if they want to head for the New Valley [El-Wadi El-Gedid] and go above [overrun] the basins where there are literally thousands of archaeological sites," said Wendorf, who suggests that before reaching such a point the sites should be marked so that when construction begins in the area these sites are already marked. "We should maintain the authority to protect these areas," he added.

Some measures deemed necessary have been discussed. They include a plan for the cultural development of the Toshka region, along with a policy for the conservation of archaeological sites in their ecological habitats. The plan is to be carried out in collaboration with the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), the Tourism Development Authority (TDA) and the Ministry of Defence.

The elements of such a plan, as disclosed by Gaballa, include training Egyptian site managers, supervising desert tourist safari groups, protecting desert archaeological sites by a mobile force of desert patrols that can travel for long distances as well as establishing an open-air museum that includes an ecological park, replicas of sites and archaeological features and a reconstruction of prehistoric settlements.

The will is there. The warning has been sounded.



Time to exhale



Thanks to a 'cup II' of splendid goals, Egypt's football players returned from Burkina Faso with the African Nations Cup, much to the amazement of a euphoric nation, which included **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab**



Scenes of celebration: Joyous crowds engulf the team bus at the airport; President Mubarak poses with the team members upon their arrival at Cairo Airport. Top row: Tarek Mustafa hurdles a South African player; Ahmed Hassan celebrates his score; a South African player mourns his team's surprise loss; Coach Mahmoud El-Gohary celebrates; goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed and star forward Hossam Hassan display their trophy. Bottom row: Fans take their post-match celebrations onto the streets of Cairo

photos (main & r) Mohamed Wassim, strap in the middle AFP, bottom photos Moussa Mahmoud

A totally unexpected victory for a totally unsuspecting country. Egypt's 2-0 win over South Africa to claim the African Nations Cup took most Egyptians completely by surprise. And yet, there it was, the continent's most coveted trophy, held aloft by the Pharaohs in Burkina Faso and, the day after, by President Hosni Mubarak himself on the tarmac of Cairo Airport.

Mubarak joined more than 30,000 football fans at the airport on Sunday to give an unprecedented hero's welcome to Egypt's national team. Saturday's convincing 2-0 victory in Burkina Faso over defending champions South Africa was the fourth African cup for the Egyptian team, but their first in 12 years.

It was also a personal triumph for the grey-haired, chain-smoking coach Mahmoud El-Gohari who made history by becoming the first person to win the cup as a player and a coach. El-Gohari, who took Egypt to the 1990 World Cup, was top scorer with three goals in the 1959 Africa cup.

Egyptian organisation and discipline conquered the pace and flair of South Africa, dubbed "Bafana Bafana", or the boys. But things did not look good for Egypt before the championship began. Morale was low and expectations even lower. Egypt had failed to qualify for the World Cup and had fared poorly in several friendly matches leading up to a championship they had not won since 1986, when this country hosted the event. Egypt was also in the so-called 'Group of Death' in Burkina Faso, paired alongside the likes of Morocco and Zambia.

But lady luck was on Egypt's side. A host of normally strong football countries fell by the wayside. Meanwhile, Egypt stitched together a series of well-deserved victories over Zambia, Côte d'Ivoire and hosts Burkina Faso, culminating in the clash with South Africa in the final.

It seemed that all of Egypt was glued to the TV on Saturday, watching the team's outstanding 2-0 victory. Everybody, old and young, men and women, even those who know next to nothing about football, were cheering the Egyptians on in every house and coffee shop. The streets, virtually deserted during the match, came to life after the Moroccan referee blew the final whistle, signalling the result: Egypt had won the 21st African Nations Cup.

When the players held the cup aloft, there were only about 200 Egyptian fans in Burkina Faso. Back home, though, the number was astronomically high. Thousands poured onto the streets in a passionate and often unabashed display of joy. Even in schools the following day, students and teachers cheered for El-Gohari and his team, singing the national anthem with extra vigour. It had been long years of pent-up frustrations and it was time for Egyptians to heave a sigh of relief and collectively exhale.

Egypt didn't win just a cup. It won a new team and a coach who had been reportedly on the verge of resigning before the tournament. Three Egyptian players were also selected for the all-African team: Goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed, defender Hani Ramzi and striker Hossam Hassan.

Mubarak was AT Cairo Airport 15 minutes before the team's arrival. As the players disembarked, he kissed and hugged each one and joked with them as well. "You had me sitting on edge last night," Mubarak told them. "Congratulations to all of you. Now go and get some rest; you need a week's sleep." Mubarak was flanked by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif.

The plane's co-pilot unfurled a huge Egyptian flag from the window of the aircraft as it taxied to a halt on the tarmac. The first out was the team's captain and top goalscorer Hassan followed by El-Gohari. A slight drizzle shared in welcoming the victorious team.

On President Mubarak's orders, the Egyptian Football Federation awarded each player LE50,000.

It took the players an hour to negotiate the 200 metres from the plane's steps to the bus. Outside the airport, fans climbed trees and rooftops of nearby kiosks waving flags, beating drums and shouting slogans praising the team.

"This is like when Sadat came back from Camp David," said a veteran airport employee. Former President Anwar Sadat signed historic agreements with Israel in 1978 at the US presidential retreat, paving the way for the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty in 1979.

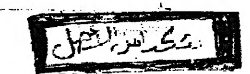
As a result of the win in Burkina Faso, Egypt automatically qualifies, along with hosts Zimbabwe, for the 2000 African Cup which should also mark the return of Olympic champions Nigeria, whose two-year suspension for failing to defend the title ended this weekend.

The championship did mark the end of distinguished careers for former African footballers of the year Abedi Pele of Ghana and Kalusha Bwalya of Zambia.

It was the hope of many that the cup was not the end but the beginning of a new era in Egyptian football.

Champions at a glance

1998 tournament:
First round: Mozambique 2-0, Zambia 4-0, Morocco 0-1.
Quarterfinals: Ivory Coast 0-0 (5-4) penalties.
Semifinals: Burkina Faso 2-0.
Final: South Africa 2-0.
Scorers:
Hossam Hassan (7), Ahmed Hassan, Tarek Moustafa, Yasser Radwan (one each)
Tournament appearances:
16 (record)
Winners:
1957, 1959, 1986, 1998 (share record with Ghana)
Overall record:
61 played, 30 wins, 11 draws, 20 losses, 99 goals.
Captain:
Hossam Hassan, 31-year-old striker of Ahli club who won his 124th cap against South Africa.
Coach:
Mahmoud El-Gohari, chain-smoking 60-year-old former army brigadier who scored a hat-trick and collected a winners medal in the 1959 tournament.
Rankings:
4 Africa, 26 world.
Nickname:
The Pharaohs.





Mahmoud El-Gohary

Coach with a new look

For Mahmoud El-Gohary, his latest stint as Egypt's national football team coach proved to be third-time lucky. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

Amid dreams of winning the African Nations Cup and nightmares of crashing out of the first round, the often-maligned coach of the Egyptian football team, Mahmoud El-Gohary, flew to Burkina Faso determined to prove he was up to the task.

Twice before he had coached the team, achieving some success in the 1990 World Cup in Italy, but proving a failure when Egypt performed miserably in the 1992 African Cup in Senegal. But when the team needed a coach last year, the call for El-Gohary came up again.

A year ago, the head of the Egyptian Football Federation, Samir Zaher, swore at a session of the People's Assembly Youth Committee that El-Gohary, his long-time friend and teammate in the 1959 African Cup, was the best coach available. But members of the youth committee had serious doubts.

In the hearing Zaher said, "After Mahmoud El-Khatib and Farouk Gaffar failed to develop the team, we have no choice. Either recruit a foreign coach, or Mahmoud El-Gohary. Personally, I trust he will do something worthwhile."

At the time El-Gohary was coaching Oman's national team. When the call came, he grabbed the chance with tooth and nail, despite his contract with Oman. In a somewhat comical situation, he tried to persuade the Omanis to let him coach both their team and the Egyptian squad.

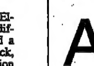
Eventually, El-Gohary returned, but he had conditions, the most important being to rehire his old staff of trainers, administrators and a physician.

For El-Gohary, there was much at stake. He knew that failure would almost certainly end his career as national team coach. But his third term as coach, in last year's World Cup qualifying match against Liberia, proved to be anything but successful. Egypt lost 0-1 and effectively dropped out of the World Cup. Once again, El-Gohary was the target of vicious media and fan criticism and once again, it looked like his downfall was near.

But with a team of fighters full of hopes, El-Gohary's approach to the African Cup was different. In the qualifying games, he achieved a balance between a strong defence and quick, snappy counter-attacks, taking into consideration that black African players top Egyptians in physical fitness and stamina.

In Burkina Faso, the team, which included World Cup survivors Hossam Hassan and Hani Ramzy, peaked just in time. And El-Gohary learned from his mistakes. He stopped predicting victories. He stopped experimenting with new tactics and the players, in turn, followed his instructions to the letter. By the time of the final match with South Africa, the whole team was physically and mentally prepared. For the first time the team played like professionals and its coach looked like he knew exactly what he was doing.

After having brought home the trophy, El-Gohary, who became the only man to win the African Cup as a player and a coach, has opened a new chapter in his relations with the media and fans who shouted his name again and again the night Egypt won the cup. But this time it was all in praise.



Africa's new stars

Egypt's Hossam Hassan, 31, scored seven goals going into the final. Côte d'Ivoire's Joel Tiehi, 33, scored four before his team was eliminated but goalkeeper Alain Gouamene, 31, failed to conjure up a repeat of the 1992 final when his saves in a tense penalty shoot-out against Ghana brought Côte d'Ivoire the trophy. This time, Egypt eliminated Côte d'Ivoire on penalties. Morocco's captain and stalwart in defence, Noureddine Naybet, put in a solid performance and next appears in France in the World Cup.

Hassan will miss out on France but despite his age still has his sights on an appearance in 2002. "I love playing football, I love winning. I think I am fit enough to go on for a long time. There will be players in France who are in their mid-30s, such as Carlos Valderrama. Age is not important as long as you are fit enough," Hassan said.

South African striker Benedict McCarthy set alight the 21st African Nations Cup in Burkina Faso with a clutch of goals that restored the flagging fortunes of the outgoing champions. The 20-year-old Ajax star, who put four goals past Namibia to join an elite club of African marksmen, gave the Bafana (the Boys) a timely boost ahead of their first World Cup appearance in France in June. But solid, and in some cases sparkling, performances from some of Africa's veterans — principally prolific striker Hassan — helped to underline that raw talent and youthful enthusiasm are not everything.

For one distinguished veteran, Cameroon's 1990 World Cup hero Roger Milla, many of the youngsters coming through the ranks today want too much too soon. "There is less talent around today because I think those with talent don't want to put in the work," he told Reuters in an interview. "They want to be stars immediately and they forget that to be a star you must show application."

Milla, himself a striker, is full of praise for McCarthy who emerged in the under-20 World Cup in Malaysia last year. "He is the star of the cup. He does not play in a complicated way. He is showing how a modern centre forward should develop."

Other rising stars caught the eye of Milla and other pundits during this year's cup though they shone more briefly. Cameroon's Pierre Womenlend, already playing his second Nations Cup at 18, and defender Rigobert Song, 21, crashed out in the quarterfinals as did Côte d'Ivoire's Ibrahima Bakayoko, 21, and Saliou Lassissi, 19.

Ghana's Peter Ofori-quaye, 17, had an earlier exit when four-times champions Ghana, the most successful team in the competition's history, failed to get beyond the qualifying group. Namibia's Eliphas Shivuti and Robert Nauseb, both 23, and Johannes Hindjou, 18, suffered the same fate, although their team had lesser expectations than Ghana and were far from disgraced.

But unlike in earlier cups, when the younger players were still based in Africa, most of the young talent has already been snapped up by richer clubs from elsewhere. Wome, a left-sided utility player who scored with an exquisite free kick against Guinea, has a contract with Italy's Vicenza but plays for Lucchese in the same country's second division. Song plays for French championship contenders Metz. Ofori-quaye, another striker, plays for Greek side Oympiakos, sweeper Lassissi plays for French side Rennes and striker Bakayoko, who scored two goals in Burkina Faso, plays for Montpelier. Shivuti, who scored two, plays for Motherwell in Scotland.

Among the goalkeepers, Burkina Faso's Ibrahima Diarra, 27, whose name means lion, stood out, before he and the rest of the team let slip a three-goal lead to lose Friday's third-place playoff on penalties to the Democratic Republic of Congo. "If his team reached the semifinal it was thanks to him," Milla said.

As new faces emerge, others quit the international scene. Ghana's Abedi Pele, 33, and Zambia's Kalusha Bwalya, 34, bowed out of international competition at this year's cup after polished performances.

(Reuters)

A new kid on the block

In a final of a different kind, Masri captured Egypt's football cup for the first time in the club's 78-year history. **Abeer Anwar** witnessed the history-making game



Egypt's cup for the first time in Port Said after they defeated Arab Contractors in the final match

photos: Mohamed Wassim



Finally, after almost 80 years, Masri and its fans had something to cheer about. Beating all the odds, the team from Port Said captured the Egyptian football cup, defeating Arab Contractors 4-3.

"It was a dream that we have long waited for," said Abdel-Wahab Kota, president of Masri club. For a team that had never won the league title or had its name etched on the cup, Friday's triumph was not only a dream come true but also a feat.

The final this year had a different look. Both Ahli and Zamalek, the country's powerhouses, were visibly absent, making it only the fourth time in cup history that neither team graced the final.

The road to the final was not a cakewalk for Masri. The club scraped by Shams 1-0, beat Ismaili, last year's cup winner, 4-3 on penalty kicks and squeezed by hot favourites Ahli 2-0. The match against Ahli was also decided on penalty kicks in a game that will be most remembered, not because Masri won, but for Ahli squandering an incredible four consecutive penalties.

For Arab Contractors, the path was smoother since it played most of its matches at home. Before reaching the semifinals against Ittihad, it disposed of Qena 2-0 and Baladiat Mahalla 3-1. Then came the away game to Ittihad in Alexandria before 20,000 fans. Still, the Contractors managed to come out on top 2-1.

In the final, Arab Contractors was depending heavily on its experience, having participated in five African club championships, capturing the continent's winners cup twice in 1982 and 1983. The team also had one domestic cup title and one league championship under its belt.

But it was Masri which got off to a quick start, in fact the fastest in cup history. Seif Dawoud scored on a breakaway with just under a minute gone, to the delight of the 25,000 fans who came from Port Said to cheer their team. Green, Masri's jersey colour, quickly enveloped Cairo Stadium, as Masri fans sensed this could be the day they had been waiting for.

The second half started with the sending-off of Contractors' Mustafa Marin for rough tackling. An early second half goal by Masri's Ahmed Ibrahim made it an even more uphill struggle for Contractors. And the minute Masri's Effat Nassar came in as a substitute he made it 3-0 with only 19 minutes left to play.

Then it was Arab Contractors' turn. It answered back in the 72nd minute. But it was short-lived delight. Masri was not to be denied, replying with a goal just one minute later. With the score 4-1, Arab Contractors scored two more goals, in the 83rd minute and in extra time, but it was too little, too late.

One minute before the final whistle, Arab Contractors Austrian coach Joseph Burger conceded defeat, walking over to congratulate his German counterpart, Masri coach Michael Krueger.

Masri players took LE15,000 each for their efforts while Krueger pocketed a more substantial $100,000 bonus.

Predictably, Masri players and fans partied through the night in their hometown and in Cairo Stadium, singing a number of songs composed just for the occasion, on a day they thought would never come.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Dr Olfat El-Siba'i:

A time to reap

The first Egyptian woman surgeon, she is also the first chairwoman of a surgery department in this country. It was a long haul from *petit point* to the scalpel. But she has made it at last


photo: Randa Shaath

She explained how to reach her clinic in Dokki. For a Heliopolis resident, it was not very easy to find. Then the driver asked exactly what I was *hoping not to hear: "What is her specialisation? I* can park and ask anyone about the clinic." I hemmed and hawed reluctantly. "Oh, she's a.... she's a.." At that moment I was saved, as my eye *caught the sign: Dr Olfat El-Siba'i, male in*fertility and sexual impotence.

Dr Olfat El-Siba'i is the first Egyptian to have obtained a PhD in surgery, and the first Egyptian or Arab woman — perhaps one of the very few worldwide — to be specialised in male infertility and sexual impotence.

El-Siba'i is also the first Egyptian woman to chair a surgery department. She is chairwoman of the surgery department at Menoufiya University Faculty of Medicine. She is also a member of several prestigious associations: the International Academy of Infertility and Infectious Diseases, the International Society of American University Colon and Rectum Surgeons, and the American Society of Colon and Rectum Surgeons.

With her fair complexion, blond-tinted hair, light make-up, and elegant dress, she looks like a designer, an artist or a writer. Her voice is soft but commanding.

So how do men feel about telling a woman doctor their most intimate problems? El-Siba'i must have answered this question hundreds of times in *her 30-odd years in the field.* At any international conference, she is asked if she is accepted in a conservative society like Egypt. El-Siba'i's answer is always the same: it is her good reputation *that brings patients from* everywhere in Egypt. "My success in curing patients is my judge. When I cure one patient, he brings me another."

El-Siba'i's patients, in fact, trusted and supported her, at a time when, ironically, her male colleagues were wary. "I wonder if they felt I was competing with them?"

In the waiting room, the overwhelming majority of patients are wearing the clothes characteristic of Upper Egypt. More stereotypes are being challenged here: how could these men, considered quintessentially macho, accept to be treated by a woman, especially in this field? El-Siba'i smiles: "They are easier to deal with than the '*beys*'. They believe in you completely. If they see that you cured a patient, they put all their trust in you. If you tell them they need an operation, the next day they will be ready."

Paradoxically, El-Siba'i believes that fate *played a great role in her life. She wrote her doc*toral dissertation on vareococeles, an ordinary disease, but one which causes infertility.

Fate also played a role in her securing a doctorate *in surgery. "This was not in my plans. After fin*ishing my studies, I was supposed to travel to England and join the Royal College of Surgeons. At the time, I had already finished the first preliminary exam and I was preparing for the second."

At the time, Dr Gamaleddin El-Beheiri, then head of the surgery department at the Qasr El-Aini Faculty of Medicine, suggested that she enrol for a doctorate at the faculty. "Dr El-Beheiri heard that I was a hard worker, and saw in me a talented surgeon."

Not all her colleagues agreed. For El-Siba'i, life was not a bed of roses. If fate was the spark that inspired her, perseverance was the light that allowed her to succeed.

For nine years, El-Siba'i was unable to obtain her degree. No law prevents a woman from obtaining a doctorate in surgery. Traditions, however, stood in the way. "We have to pass a preliminary exam before presenting our thesis. My professors refused the notion that a woman could *become a surgeon, so they failed me nine years* in a row. I fought back, though, and was never desperate. I won in round ten," she said.

Prejudice continued to represent an obstacle in El-Siba'i's life, however. Her promotion to head of the surgery department at Menoufiya University was passed over for two years, and another colleague was nominated instead.

She describes these years as a nightmare. "I was 'second in command' after the head of the department. But the top man was unable to accept the fact that I would take his place. I felt disappointed and unfairly treated. I was very honest in my work. I devoted all my energy to it and they wanted me out."

At this stage El-Siba'i was fighting the battle of her life. She challenged the head of the department, the dean, and the head of the Faculty of Medicine, who all opposed her appointment.

Luck *intervened at the right time, however*; a year later El-Siba'i's three opponents were replaced and she was able to accede to the post.

This perseverance was not a blind response to a challenge, however, *but the result of great ambi*tion. Ever since she was a child, El-Siba'i's dream was to be a physician. Her abiding interest in medicine, she recalls, was born when she was *11. She* had appendicitis, and was greatly impressed by the surgeon who operated on her — a relative — Dr Ismail El-Siba'i. She decided then that she would be a surgeon. When she was in secondary school, she printed signs and pinned them on the wall of her room. They proclaimed: Dr Olfat El-Siba'i, student at the Faculty of Medicine. Her parents started calling her Dr Olfat when she was six.

Now El-Siba'i describes the surgery department as her kingdom. Her position obliges her to treat her colleagues firmly and kindly. Heading the *department* is a *crown* of laurels, but not one that she can rest on. Her post demands constant efforts. The department is of a vital importance. It grants BSc degrees in medicine and *surgery, diplomas, as well as Masters* and Doctorates of Science. The success of the department is measured by the standard of surgery and emergency cases it undertakes.

El-Siba'i is also something of a mother figure to her colleagues. This is perhaps inevitable since her professional and private lives overlap at home, too: her two sons are surgeons. "I never punish the people working with me severely, but if anyone misbehaves I remind them of the ethical standards that should be upheld," she says.

She has two brothers and, as the only daughter, was the focus of her parents' attention as a child. Her father, an engineer, adored her; her mother, a retired teacher, was utterly devoted to her. "I was pampered but never spoilt. My relationship with my parents was one of love and friendship, and this made me very eager to deserve their respect and esteem," she explains.

She believes that her parents shared in forming her character. Her father taught her to be ambitious and to love reading. She read many of the books in the vast library he had collected. Her *mother taught her the value of femininity; from* her, she inherited her sense of dress and her ladylike demeanour. El-Siba'i also learned needlework from her mother, and this traditionally feminine activity, paradoxically, was to assist her in later years: "Being talented with a needle made me skillful as a surgeon. Both need the same accuracy in using the palm and the fingers; both demand a similar technique."

Having broken into a traditionally male field, she does not believe that motherhood is a distinctive mission in itself, dispensing women from other achievements outside the family. Anyone can establish a family and raise children, El-Siba'i explains; any woman can be a mother. But this is not how she has chosen to make her mark. "I *do not see anything wrong with seeking to be* distinguished and refusing to be like all the others, who pass away quietly."

Yet El-Siba'i did not sacrifice her family for her career. *She looks after her family and house* as any mother would. She supervised her sons' education at school and university; she does the shopping and looks after the house. "When I have to travel, everything collapses. My sons and husband depend on me for everything. This tires me out, but I find great pleasure in it."

Balancing between one's professional and private or social life does require exceptional amounts of energy. But El-Siba'i sees this as a chain reaction: if one is successful, then this happiness is reflected on the family; if one is happy at home, this satisfaction is reflected on the job.

A successful mother, she asserts, is close to her children, no matter whether she works or not. She always knows what her sons are doing. "My husband was usually very busy with his research. He is also very firm with the boys, so I had to be the tender element in their life. We enjoyed a *friendship that grew with time.*"

During the harrowing exams every medical student fears, she depended on her mother for help with the children, and tried to make up for this *temporary distance by lavishing more love* and time on them afterwards. "I used to take them everywhere with me. Fortunately, both their school and the hospital where I worked were near my clinic, so they used to come out of school and spend all afternoon with me. They were 13 and 14-years-old when I allowed them to enter the operating room with me." Today, they can apply the lessons they learned from her as they operate on their own patients.

El-Siba'i's husband, renowned surgeon Ahmed Shafik, was her professor. They were married after she had finished her studies, in the late '60s. If they had not met, El-Siba'i believes each would have failed. As it is, they are remarkably compatible: "He can study all day, his life is de*voted to scientific research. This does not annoy* me. I respect his solitude. It also gives me the chance to complete my work."

Her husband is also a great believer in her philosophy. *Her culture and her ambition*, which would have frightened off a less confident man, drew him to her; as for El-Siba'i, she jokes that she married Shafik mainly because he was a surgeon. True, he taught her how to hold a scalpel; but "I might not have been attracted to him if he was specialised in another field." Is it really a joke? "Don't be surprised; being a surgeon is part of his character. Character is not only how someone talks or looks or even dresses. One's profession can also lend a kind of beauty and glamour."

Professional rivalry never marred the relationship — perhaps, one is tempted to think, because El-Siba'i continues to respect Shafik as a professor. She has always admired his ability to simplify surgical principles for his students, and still keeps his surgery notes from the medical school days.

Today, El-Siba'i is in her '50s and feels life *has never been better.* This is the culmination of all the years of hard work. She attends about 25 international conferences a year. Her colleagues from around the world usually greet her in the same way: "They say my success as a surgeon is a success for all women."

Profile by **Rasha Saad**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ One of our bright young reporters, **Amira Howeidy**, has just earned herself a most interesting distinction: she and a colleague from *Al-Akhbar*, **Abdel-Hadi Ibrahim**, are the lucky recipients of the scholarship sponsored by Citibank, Egypt, which entails participating in the International Seminar for Business and Economic Journalists at Columbia University. **Amira** and **Abdel-Hadi** took off last week, but before bidding us farewell, they attended the gala dinner given in honour of the successful candidates at the Ramses Hilton. Among the guests, I spotted **David Watson**, Citibank's regional officer, **Hoda Hammad**, its vice president, **Janette Wilgus**, the US Embassy's cultural attaché, and Ahmed Loutfy from the Press Department, as well as eminent editors and journalists from the Egyptian press. I was told that the young people are scheduled to take part in many exciting activities which include a visit to Citibank in New York, and several meetings with officers of the World Bank and the IMF in Washington DC. Don't I wish I was more economically minded!

♣ On a more artistic note, I do hope that you will take your charming selves to Khan Maghrabi in Zamalek, where **Gamil Shafik** is currently holding his exhibition, *The Night and Horses Quartet*. The horses are magnificent, fairy-tale creatures a bit like unicorns, and, though **Gamil**'s women are a tinsy bit robust for my taste, they remain intriguingly feminine.

On opening night, the small gallery was so crowded that one had to queue for a quick look. Sculptor **Abdel-Hadi El-Washahi** was organising the traffic until he spotted artist **Gazbiya Sirry**, whom he insisted on escorting personally around the exhibition, leaving the other guests to fend for themselves for a while.